

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA
FACULDADE DE LETRAS
DEPARTAMENTO DE ESTUDOS ANGLÍSTICOS



Simple Stories:
alternative paradigms offered
by cinema and (literature)

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DOUTORAMENTO EM ESTUDOS DE LITERATURA E DE CULTURA
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Cecilia Beecher Martins

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Abstract

This study proposes to question if watching films, telling simple stories with positive outcomes can help reduce anxiety levels in the short term. It also queries if reflecting on individual connections between viewer and movie can increase coping strategies both immediately and in the longer term. For the purpose of this thesis simple stories are defined as narratives that can be easily assimilated by viewers, but that, on reflection, can confront conventional wisdom and potentially lead to changes in attitude. The term is also extended to include the texts written by volunteers as they tried to explain strong connections with movies, since these normally followed a direct narrative format even when dealing with complex issues.

The conceptual framework of this project is supported by academic theory and practical research carried out in many different areas, including reflections taken from psychoanalytical literary criticism as presented by Norman Holland in *Meeting Movies* (2006), and Holland and Schwartz in *Know Thyself: The Delphi Seminars* (2008), as well as scientific research in the areas of neurobiology as presented by Antonio Damasio in *Descartes Error* (1994), *The Feeling of What Happens* (2000), and *Looking for Spinoza* (2003), and neuroendocrinology as defended by Robert Sapolsky in *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers* (1994). It also draws from studies carried out in cognitive sciences, especially those presented by Aaron Beck *et al.* in *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* (1979) and Richard Gerrig in *Experiencing Narrative Worlds* (1998), as well as, from Martin Heidegger's proposals on anxiety presented in *Being and Time* (1926).

While the aforementioned contributed towards the comprehension of why and how readers and viewers connect with fictional narratives, the study also reviewed literary programs as well as analysis methods to develop practical and reproducible methods of working with movies that would maintain the enjoyment of the experience, while enhancing their potential effects on the viewer. Practical trials were devised to investigate these questions.

The work itself is divided into two parts, the development of a theoretical framework and practical trials divided into three sections. The first practical section involves individual film screenings where singular volunteers performed free associative film criticism to movies they had chosen for free associatively analysis following methods adapted from *Meeting Movies* (2006) and *Know Thyself* (2008). The

purpose was to determine if this method could permit viewers to acquire a deeper understanding and acceptance of their unique identity theme as defined by Heinz Lichtenstein in “Identity and Sexuality — A Study of their Interrelationship in Man” (1961). The second involves group screenings of films telling simple stories, mainly Cameron Crowe’s *Elizabethtown* (2005) and Lasse Hallstrom’s *Chocolate* (2000). Practical tools such as psychometric scales were used in these screenings to evaluate quantitatively if and how watching this type of movie influences state anxiety levels. Open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires were also employed to gain insight as to whether involvement with this type of fictional story can provide alternative ways of looking at difficult living situations. One group screening involved volunteers watching different types of movies – Cameron Crowe’s *Elizabethtown* (2005) and Vicente Amorim’s *Good* (2008) – to understand if the type of movie viewed influenced alterations in anxiety levels. In the third section as a consequence of the way the work progressed, all the methods mentioned above were employed to construct more directed techniques. The aim was to use the interaction between films telling simple stories and viewers to help volunteers deal with high state or trait anxiety levels and to encourage them to construct new coping strategies.

Despite the variety of techniques employed, as the project reached its closing stages, it became increasingly evident that the movie watching experience can be powerful and positive. On occasions, the specific movie viewing experience offered to volunteers on the trials resulted not only in reductions in state and trait anxiety levels; it offered some volunteers a means of dealing with these consciously. It also encouraged some to develop new coping strategies for particular situations in their lives. Volunteers using free associative film criticism generally achieved an increased awareness and acceptance of self, which in itself led to reduced anxiety levels as well as a capacity to produce new coping strategies. Examining the outcomes of the practical trials against the concept of a body-minded brain was essential to create a theoretical framework that could elucidate the results obtained. The overall answers to the research questions were both concrete and encouraging.

Key words: cinema, narrative, free associative film criticism, anxiety & coping skills, identity.

Resumo

Este estudo propõe questionar se o facto de visionar filmes que relatam histórias simples com finais felizes e positivos pode ajudar a reduzir, a curto prazo, os níveis de ansiedade dos espectadores. Lança também a pergunta se uma reflexão sobre estas ligações íntimas criadas entre espectador e filme pode aumentar “estratégias de *coping*”¹, tanto em termos imediatos, como a longo prazo. Para efeitos da presente tese, histórias simples são definidas como narrativas que podem ser facilmente assimiladas pelos espectadores, mas que, associadas a reflexão, podem pôr em causa o saber convencional e potencialmente, levar a mudanças de atitude. O termo também foi estendido a textos escritos por espectadores voluntários, ao explicarem a sua ligação com este tipo de filmes. Normalmente, estes últimos seguem um formato de narrativa direta, mesmo quando tratam de questões complexas.

O quadro concetual deste projeto apoia-se em teorias académicas e investigações com aplicação prática, realizadas em diferentes áreas, incluindo reflexões tiradas da crítica literária psicanalítica, tal como as apresentadas por Norman Holland em *Meeting Movies* (2006), e Holland e Schwartz em *Know Thyself: The Delphi Seminars* (2008). Por outro lado, o projecto apoia-se em investigações científicas na área da neurobiologia, como as apresentadas por António Damásio em *Descartes Error* (1994), *The Feeling of What Happens* (2000) e *Looking for Spinoza* (2003), e em teorias da neuro-endocrinologia defendidas por Robert Sapolsky em *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers* (1994). Foram também tidos em consideração, estudos realizados no domínio das ciências cognitivas, especialmente os apresentados por Aaron Beck *et al.* em *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* (1979) e Richard Gerrig in *Experiencing Narrative Worlds* (1998). As propostas de Martin Heidegger sobre a ansiedade, apresentadas em *Being and Time* (1926), serviram também de base concetual.

Por um lado, este trabalho de investigação científica contribuiu para a minha compreensão de *como* e *porquê* os leitores e espectadores tentam criar ligações fortes e pessoais com narrativas ficcionais, por outro lado, estudei experiências já feitas com programas literários, e métodos de análise. Por exemplo, programas como “Changing Lives Through Literature” de Robert Waxler de University of Massachusetts,

¹ Estratégias de *coping* podem ser interpretadas com estratégias psicológicas que ajudam a lidar com situações reais.

Dartmouth USA e “Social Marketing” de Jay Winston de Harvard School of Public Health, e críticas cinematográficas de índole psicanalítica baseadas na associação livre “free associative film criticism”. Este lado mais prático da investigação teve como finalidade o desenvolvimento de métodos simples e práticos para trabalhar com filmes, mantendo o prazer da experiência de ver um filme, mas procurando ao mesmo tempo melhorar os efeitos potenciais do contacto entre filme e espectador. O estudo procurou desenvolver processos que podem ser repetidos, cujos resultados fossem quantificáveis, com o objectivo de produzir dados concretos sobre o impacto do um dado filme na vida do espectador.

A pesquisa prática encontra-se dividida em três secções. A primeira envolveu a exibição de filmes com voluntários individuais. Foi ensinado a estes voluntários como fazer crítica cinematográfica psicanalítica com filmes que eles próprios tinham escolhido. Entre os filmes analisados nesta secção incluem-se *Elizabethtown*, (2005) de Cameron Crowe, *Pay It Forward* (2000) de Mini Leder, e *Dirty Dancing* (1987) de Emile Ardolino. Foram adaptados os métodos de crítica cinematográfica e literária apresentados em *Meeting Movies* (2006) e *Know Thyself* (2008), com o objetivo de determinar se estes métodos podem permitir aos espectadores adquirir uma aceitação e uma compreensão mais profunda do seu “tema único de identidade”, tal como definido por Heinz Lichtenstein em "Identity and Sexuality: A Study of their Interrelationship in Man" (1961).

Nos casos analisados, este tipo de crítica cinematográfica gerou, nos voluntários, maior consciencialização e aceitação de si mesmo. Em alguns casos, este momento funcionou como reafirmação da escolha do estilo de vida, já adotado, por vezes, pelos voluntários, mas não muito usual no seu contexto social e, com tal, uma fonte de um certo nível de ansiedade. Neste caso, a análise funcionou como reafirmação e confirmação. A mesma análise permitiu a outros voluntários reconhecer padrões de hábitos destrutivos e corrigi-los. Neste contexto, posso dizer que os resultados foram notáveis.

Na segunda secção abordaram-se sessões cinematográficas em grupo. Os voluntários visionaram filmes de histórias simples, entre outras *Elizabethtown* (2005), de Cameron Crowe e *Chocolate* (2000) de Lasse Hallstrom. Estas sessões foram acompanhadas pela utilização de ferramentas práticas, tais como questionários psicométricos e questionários mais longos de “resposta-aberta” e “auto-avaliação”.

Os questionários psicométricos foram usados para avaliar quantitativamente *se e como* este tipo de filmes pode influenciar os níveis de ansiedade. Os modelos utilizados foram ‘*Inventário de Estado-Traço de Ansiedade*’ (STAI), porque estes questionários são proporcionados para distinguir entre “ansiedade de estado” e “ansiedade de traço”. Estes modelos têm sido utilizados para medir reacções a eventos de curta duração e para analisar mudanças nos níveis de ansiedade provocada durante a observação de eventos fictícios filmados. São também regularmente usados em ambientes educacionais. Os resultados destes testes mostraram que, em geral, os níveis de ansiedade de estado diminuíram muito significativamente com a perspectiva de assistir a um filme, e que, geralmente, o nível manteve-se durante a visualização, quando um filme como *Elizabethtown* ou *Chocolate* foi visto. Um grupo de voluntários assistiu a diferentes tipos de filmes – *Elizabethtown* (2005), de Cameron Crowe e *Good* (2008) de Vicente Amorim – com o objectivo de perceber se o tipo de filme visto influencia as alterações nos níveis de ansiedade. Neste ensaio, seguiram-se grandes diferenças relacionadas com o tipo de filme exibido, pois enquanto os níveis de “ansiedade de estado” continuaram a diminuir durante a exibição de *Elizabethtown*, durante a exibição de *Good* aumentaram.

Os questionários mais longos de “auto-avaliação” e “resposta-aberta” foram utilizados para obter informações sobre eventuais alterações na maneira de ver e lidar com situações concretas. Os resultados mostraram que, em certas circunstâncias, o envolvimento com este tipo de histórias de ficção provoca alterações profundas na própria atitude perante as dificuldades.

Na terceira secção, como consequência da forma como o trabalho progredia, foram utilizados todos os métodos acima mencionados para a construção de técnicas mais direccionadas. Procurou-se usar a interação entre os filmes que contam histórias simples e os espectadores, com o objetivo de ajudar os voluntários a lidar com níveis de “ansiedade de estado” e/ou “traço” e encorajá-los a construir novas “estratégias de coping”.

Todos os ensaios foram acompanhados de uma explicação e discussão sobre o processamento que o corpo faz dos objetos externos, tal como apresentado por António Damásio, sobre o desenvolvimento e processamento da ansiedade como conceito presente em *Being and Time* (1926) de Martin Heidegger e a noção de que qualquer um pode aspirar à felicidade, desde que tenha consciência do seu tema único da identidade, ou forma única de estar no mundo, aceite isso e o considere na tomada de decisões

importantes da vida. Na terceira secção, as discussões foram mais longas e profundas. Tornou-se também evidente que ver um filme no contexto cérebro-corpo-mente é essencial para criar um quadro teórico elucidativo.

Apesar da variedade das técnicas aplicadas, tornou-se evidente que a experiência de ver e interagir com um filme pode ser poderosa e positiva. Tendo em conta que o visionamento dos filmes, quer em ensaios individuais, quer em ensaios de grupo, foi sempre acompanhado da discussão dos temas acima mencionados, a experiência de ver um filme nos ensaios teve como resultado a redução dos níveis de “ansiedade de traço” e de “estado”, que, por si só, ofereceu algumas vantagens aos voluntários. Este contacto encorajou também alguns a desenvolver novas “estratégias de *coping*” para situações particulares das suas vidas. Os voluntários recorrendo à “crítica livre associativa de filmes” alcançaram, em geral, uma maior consciência e aceitação de si mesmos, o que baixou os seus níveis de ansiedade de “estado” e de “traço”, aumentando a capacidade de produção de estratégias para enfrentar situações difíceis. Pode assim afirmar-se que os resultados globais foram tanto concretos quanto encorajadores.

Palavras-chaves: estudos de cinema, narrativa, crítica cinematográfica em associação livre, ansiedade & estratégias de *coping*, identidade.

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Choruses from the Rock

The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.
Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

T. S. Eliot

Loaves and Fishes

This is not
the age of information.

This is *not*
the age of information.

Forget the news
and the radio
and the blurred screen.

This is the time
of loaves
and fishes.

People are hungry,
and one good word is bread
for a thousand.

David Whyte.

Introduction

This thesis is the result of a study structured around two research questions. First, I wanted to explore if involvement with fictional worlds offered by literary and filmic narratives might have a positive effect on readers' and viewers' lives both during the more immediate period of contact, and in a longer term. Second, I wanted to inquire into the possibility of developing repeatable methods of working with a specific fictional narrative format, films, that might preserve the enjoyment and uniqueness of the viewing experience while, at the same time, improve viewers' awareness of self and/or permit an expansion of viewers' total living experience and enhance coping skills. These are the principle ideas I had in mind when I proposed to investigate "Simple Stories: alternative paradigms offered by cinema and (literature)". Literature appears in brackets in the title because even though I used literary studies to form the conceptual framework of the work, and I consider that the practical methods used throughout could easily be adopted for use with written texts, I only used films in my practical trials.

This study involved two distinct operational methods. The first revolved around the definition of the object of my research and the second focused on the development and implementation of practical working methods that sought to measure potential effects of readers' and viewers' involvement with fictional worlds. To produce this conceptual framework, I investigated areas as diverse as psychoanalytical literary criticism, neuropsychology, neurobiology, cognitive science, and therapeutic practises, as well as literary studies to gain insight into why people read books or watch movies.

I began the academic review that would go on to form the conceptual framework of this thesis studying Holland's psychoanalytical literary and film criticism. I was initially introduced to Holland's thinking in this area by his essay "The Mind and the Book" (1998). Written from a psychoanalytical literary perspective, this was one of Holland's first essays to explore the idea that literature has the capacity to expand the reader's total living experience. He proposes that literature can act as a transitional and transformational object, since it has the ability to permit readers absorb, as part of their total living experience, events and emotions that they have only encountered as a result of reflective contact with literature. Holland's proposals are bold, but grounded in a profound understanding of psychoanalytical theory as well as literary criticism. Therefore, they opened my mind to possibilities that I would not otherwise have

entertained. Reading this essay was the first time that I thought seriously about how narrative objects could influence readers' and viewers' physical brains and augment their real living experience.

Over the years, two principle forces have driven Holland's work. The first is his desire to understand identity through free associative literary and film analysis, the second, an aspiration to comprehend how contact with fictional narratives may influence the brains and minds of readers and viewers. While Holland proposes that reflective contact with literature and film, through free associative analysis, can improve awareness and acceptance of self, he also suggests that other forms of contemplation may enhance the transitional and transformation capacity of the individual's contact with the fictional narrative in a more general manner.

He pursues this broader avenue in his neurobiological study presented in *Literature and the Brain* (2009), where he postulates on how contact with fictional narratives may influence bodies, minds and lives. Considerations from this study would prove fundamental to my conceptual framework, and thinking on how contact with literary objects could enhance coping skills. He expands further on the transitional and transformational capacity of literature and other art forms referring to Donald Winnicott's object relations theory and conceptualization of how both creating and enjoying artistic objects can enhance one's total living experience. Holland proposes:

Paediatrician and psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott famously suggested that creative experiences, either of making or appreciating the arts, take place in a "potential space" between inner and outer worlds. In such a space we recapture our earliest half-merged relationship with a mother. Literature, therefore helps us live better, in Winnicott's view, because it allows us to loosen boundaries: between self and non-self; inner and outer; past, present, and future; or using and enjoying (Kant's "disinterestness"). The arts help us to go back to a time when we were not so rigidly compartmented into our working and playing and loving selves (2009:330).

I found Holland's suggestions that contact with literature can help us live better and return us to simpler less rigidly compartmented times, in terms of individual development, worthy of further investigation. His proposals on the biological processing of literature also opened interesting avenues of thought, and encouraged me to pursue this possibility also, as will be seen in Chapter One.

Holland also suggests that readers and viewers employ individual biological systems, as well as previous living experience, when interacting with fictional narratives: "Enjoying a poem, a story, a movie, or a play is a cognitive activity. It draws

on verbal skills. It uses knowledge of the world (declarative memory) and personal experience (episodic memory)” (89). When questioning why sometimes readers and viewers cannot explain their reactions to fictional narratives, Holland concludes that this happens because individual emotional memories are invoked automatically as a reaction to the events portrayed in the fictional work. These emotional memories are: “something that calls up our own emotional response to what we are perceiving” (91). In this model, reading a book or watching a movie becomes a whole body experience, in the broadest sense of the word.

Continuing this contemplation of the way readers’ and viewers’ bodies process the books they read and films they watch biologically, Holland proposes that readers and viewers care about the imaginary characters encountered in fictional worlds because, even though they may know intellectually that the literary representation is imaginary, from an organic processing perspective this encounter is treated in the same way as a real one. The same “automatic” biological procedures are used to process emotional responses arising from real world events and those evoked because of contact with fictional narratives. Readers only appreciate that they are dealing with fictional situations when they “reality check” or, in other words, stop and think about the thoughts they are processing: “I [Holland] know, the instant that I think about it, that Little Nell is a figment of Charles Dickens’ fertile imagination. Yet in some ways, I regard her as a real person” (107).

Therefore, if fictional events are processed by a reader’s biological systems in the same way as real world events, it is possible to consider that they really can become part of reader’s/viewer’s total biological living experiences. In Holland’s model, this proposal is reinforced when he refers to the fact that readers and viewers often still feel emotions for the fictional characters, even when reality checks verify, at a conscious level, that the thoughts being processed are the result of reading a book or watching a movie. He writes “even sophisticated literary critics treat fictional characters like real people.” (107) The emotions evoked by contact with these fictional characters offer evidence suggesting that literary events are processed at a bodily level, in a manner comparable to the processing of real world events.

Thus, reading books and watching movies may allow the body to experience previously unknown events and habits. This idea made me further question if and how involvement with literature might physically influence readers’ and viewers’ ways of

seeing the world they live in and enhance their ability to make proactive choices. Consequently, I proposed to develop practical methods with the objective of testing whether viewer's ability to cope with the circumstances of their daily lives improved, when the only factor altered in their circumstances, was the opportunity to forge deep contact with relevant fictional narratives.

The theoretical and practical investigation associated with this project led me to consider that cinema and literature might offer viewers and readers different types of alternative paradigms. I considered that alternative world views might be seen as one of the alternative paradigms that cinema and literature could offer viewers and readers, since reading novels or watching movies can encourage contemplation of events and circumstances outside of the scope of normal living realities. The alternative paradigm in this case arises from individual connections between viewers and movies and readers and books because singular connections with fictional narratives might permit individual readers or viewers to consider issues relevant to them from different perspectives.

As my research continued I went on to enquire if free associative film analysis could encourage an intimate connection between movies and viewers. In *Meeting Movies* (2006) Holland proposes that free associative film criticism can allow viewers to become aware of and understand their unique interactions with movies. He suggests that this form of film analysis can also offer a means of gaining increased awareness and acceptance of self. This journey of self-awareness, through film criticism, was another aspect of the alternative paradigms hypothesis I wished to pursue. In the latter stages of the film trials, I went on to question if free associative film analysis might help sustain reductions in viewers' anxiety levels.

I also wanted to investigate if reflective viewing of films and/or deep reading of books has the ability to improve viewers' and readers' capacity to deal with real-life issues, and thus enhance coping skills. I define coping skills according to the guidelines established by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman in *Stress, Appraisal and Coping* (1984) and Charles Snyder in *Coping: The Psychology of What Works* (1999). Lazarus and Folkman propose that coping skills are acquired adaptational activities differing from responsive adaptational devices like reflexes because they are activated by concerted effort, instead of automatic responses. This implies that coping skills follow patterns established by the individual. Referring to Lazarus and Folkman's work in their

paper “The relationship between anxiety, coping strategies and characteristics of patients with diabetes”, Tunkey *et al.* (2008) propose that successful coping skills produce constantly changing cognitive, behavioural and emotional efforts that can permit the individual to manage particular taxing external and/or internal demands that could exceed the individual’s resources under other circumstances. Similarly, Snyder proposes that coping skills offer responses that can diminish the physical, emotional and psychological burden linked to stressful life events and daily worries. I wondered if significant contact with fictional narratives could augment readers and viewers capacity to develop this type of coping skills. As such this concept became another possible alternative paradigm to be investigated. While coping skills are defined quite clearly above, it would be difficult to construct objective methods to evaluate how watching movies might enhance these. Therefore, I decided to measure alterations in anxiety as this is a tangible characteristic, converse to coping skills and prevalent in contemporary society.

Therefore, in practical terms, I set out to investigate how connection with film might offer viewers three different but related advantages: an expansion of total living experience, increased awareness and acceptance of self, and enhanced coping skills evaluated in part by measuring alterations in anxiety levels. Involvement with films in the practical work did not mean simply viewing them. Rather, it contemplated subsequent reflection and/or discussion of the object viewed. An engagement between narratives, the narrative of the other contained in the film, and the viewer’s narrative of self, was to be encouraged.

As my investigation developed, I would go on to produce separate methods for working with single volunteers to observe individual results, and larger groups to identify more global trends like those referred to above. Psychometric and open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires were used for group film screenings and different forms of free associative film analysis for individual work. Charles Spielberger’s “State and Trait Anxiety Inventories” (hereafter referred to as STAI) presented by Spielberger in *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults Sampler Set: Manual, Test Booklet and Scoring Key* (1983) was the tool I chose to work with larger group to evaluate if and how watching certain types of movies may influence viewers’ anxiety levels. I selected the STAI questionnaires because they are used extensively worldwide. Due to their reliability and coherence they continue to be translated and calibrated for use in specific geographical

and linguistic domains. An example of this is the recent calibration for the Portuguese language and reality prepared by Professor Danilo Silva of the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Lisbon presented in *Manual de Inventário de Estado-Traço de Ansiedade (STAI)* (Silva & Spielberger: 2007). I decided to use the open-answer self-reporting questionnaires on group screenings to gain insight into what watching movies could mean to volunteers. Specifically, I hoped to learn if volunteers were aware of changes in anxiety levels, and to observe if they considered that they acquired new coping skills as a result of watching the movie that was part of their screening. Cross referencing the results obtained from the different types of trials, I aspired to gain insight into when and how watching a movie could offer viewers alternative perspectives on issues relevant to their lives and states of mind at the time of viewing.

I selected free associative film analysis for individual trials because over his extensive career as a psychoanalytical literary critic, Norman Holland has used this method to build identity profiles for readers and to assist readers and viewers to become more aware of their unique identity themes as defined by Heinz Lichtenstein². This approach culminates in *Meeting Movies* (2006), where Holland assures his readers that if they follow the method laid out in this book when analyzing the films that have met them, they will gain a deeper understanding of themselves: “To meet a movie is to meet oneself, and that is what I am inviting you to do” (14) challenges Holland.

As, I wished to encourage the engagement between fictional narratives and readers and viewers, the free associative film analysis method seemed to be a natural choice. The free method presented in *Meeting Movies* is laid out in a very simple fashion. While Holland’s structural use of Lichtenstein’s theory is very patent for the reader who is familiar with Holland’s earlier work, it is reduced to a mere bibliographic reference in this volume. Therefore, the film analysis method presented can be applied without a strong theoretical knowledge of the unique identity theme theory concept. In practical application, I incorporated recommendations and instructions on teaching free associative literary criticism presented in *Know Thyself: Delphi Seminars* (Holland & Schwartz: 2008), to the format presented in *Meeting Movies*. *Know Thyself* reviews the authors’ initial experiences of teaching free associative literary criticism in light of contemporary thinking in the area of psychoanalytical literary criticism.

² Heinz Lichtenstein’s unique identity theme theory, and its relevance to Holland’s work, will be discussed in Chapter One.

My investigation into scientific theory showed me that there are different processes at work when the brain engages with a book or a film. Notwithstanding these differences, because I was looking at the transitional and transformational capacity of the literary object, operating in a potential space between audience and object, I looked equally at the influences of reading books and watching movies, since both offer similar possibilities in this area. I was further encouraged in this approach because research programs I investigated demonstrated that similar positive outcomes were obtained when significant contact occurred between audiences and fictional narratives presented in books, films, TV programs and even radio soap operas. Therefore I saw books and films as two different types of fictional narratives, their main difference lying, not in content, but in the form of presentation. The first used the written format, the second the moving image.

My thinking followed an orientation similar to that offered by Peter Widdowson. When distinguishing between different types of written texts in *Literature* (1999), Widdowson proposes that the greatest difference between literature and other written texts is that the reader is always aware that 'literary' constructs were employed in the creation of the former:

Literature, in this book, will refer to *written* works [...] I make the assumption that there is an area of human activity and production in which people choose *deliberately* to use written language in ways distinguishable from other forms of human communication: most obviously the genres of poetry, prose-fiction and drama. Their readers, therefore, are sensible of being in the presence of something, which is self-consciously 'literary' – be it eighteenth-century elegy, or performance poetry, Victorian novel or contemporary romance, Renaissance tragedy or street theatre. I am not concerned, therefore, with pamphlets, histories, journalism, diaries, car manuals, menus, promotional literature on fridge-freezers, biographies or beer-mats, while recognising that some or all of these may display 'literary' characteristics (15).

However, when considering how different art forms engage their audiences and permit them to enjoy the creative experience, Widdowson does not distinguish between literature and other art forms. Nor does he see literature as superior to music or film. In fact, he affirms that much of what he has written about the benefits of literature also applies to other art forms, including film and even TV:

Of course much of what I have said about 'the literary' could just as well be said, too, of other art forms such as music, painting or film (including TV). They are also 'creative' in the sense I have noted earlier; they also construct 'aesthetic realities' which have an oblique relationship to lived reality; they also produce 'moments of vision' which defamiliarise the 'automatised' world, and so on. By nevertheless still insisting on its

difference from the other arts and on the need to retain a discrete space or domain for it, I have no intention of trying to privilege ‘the literary’ or suggest that it is *superior* to music or painting or film. I merely wish to insist that it is indeed different from, and does different things to, those art forms. Here, the crucial factor is my original definition [...] that literature is in *written* form, and that its originating modality and final point of reference is its existence as written (not printed) text. (120- 121)

Consequently, I recognize that books and films are presented in different formats and for that reason are processed physically in different ways by our brains and might even achieve some different purposes because of this. However, as I was thinking about the opportunities they both offer readers and viewers to disengage from their real world circumstances, and connect with experiences outside of these, I viewed them as similar experiences within the context of my conceptual framework.

Another reason for my seeing literature and film as two different formats but with the ability to achieve similar results was the fact that free associative film criticism, one of the tools I would use extensively, had been adapted from a method Holland presented earlier for literature analysis, as can be seen in *5 Readers Reading* (1975). The adaptation appeared simple and the outcomes were similar with both narrative objects. Also in *Literature and the Brain* (2009), when Holland classifies literature into high and low categories, he includes many different narrative formats, from written literary texts to TV soap operas in these broad literary classifications.

Therefore, while recognizing that the format of presenting narrative is different in literature and cinema, in my primary academic research, I used both literary and film resources to form the conceptual framework of the study. However, for reasons of expediency, when it came to the practical trials, I decided to work only with films. This focus would hopefully allow me to produce more cohesive and coherent data related to my two initial research questions. I anticipated that by using free associative film criticism, STAI and self-reporting open-answer questionnaires, I would be able to develop contained and functional operational methods that might be used in a repeatable fashion to obtain consistent data and comparable results. These methods would permit me to observe trends and offer insight into “Alternative Paradigms Offered by Cinema (and Literature)”. However, even though I decided to limit the practical work to film, since this methodology was originally linked to literary studies and I consider that the methods could be adapted for use with written texts, literature also figures in the title.

If the aforementioned explains the premises of the second part of the title of this study, “Alternative Paradigms Offered by Cinema (and Literature)”, it does not clarify

the first “Simple Stories”. I chose to title my work in this manner because, from the very outset of my research, I wanted to place the notion of “Simple Stories” at the centre of this work. I was not thinking of, for example, Elizabeth Inchbald’s *A Simple Story* (1998) or even Langston Hughes’s “Simple Stories” (Hughes 2002 a, b). Rather, I wanted to investigate how direct and at times even humorous narratives that appear simple on cursory review because they encourage easy interaction, can somehow also counter social and cultural conditioning.

I was thinking of stories like those related in Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1875), Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), or Charles Dickens’ socially conscious and ever-timely novels, such as *Oliver Twist* (1839), *Hard Times* (1854) and *Little Dorrit* (1857). Many experts recognise that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* played a major role in changing public opinion on slavery.³ Beecher Stowe’s novel did this mainly because she told a rounded fictional story about a man called Tom, who happened to be a slave. She allowed her readers to engage with a new reality by demonstrating that Tom was neither a mindless child, nor morally inferior, much less a mere object that should be considered the commercial possession of another. Tom was simply a man. However, his condition as a slave forced him to live in inhuman circumstances. Beecher Stowe approached the very complex issue of slavery not with the power of logic, but with a warm and sympathy-winning narrative, demonstrating the injustice of a society whose prosperity depended on the exploitation of those who had no legal rights. She gave people an alternative view in a non-confrontational manner, providing her readers with a means to change their opinions about slavery.

Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, simple stories were initially defined as narratives that can be easily assimilated by viewers, but that, on reflection, can confront conventional wisdom and potentially lead to changes in attitude. The books used in

³ Reputable scholars, including Jean Fagan Yellin in the introduction to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1998) claim that Beecher Stowe’s novel was decisive in changing public opinion about slavery, especially in the northern states. Yellin refers to the fact that a considerable number of Union soldiers marched off to war thinking they would play a decisive role in ending slavery, “toting the book in their rucksacks” (vii). According to Shelby Foote in *The Civil War – A Narrative Red River to Appomattox* (1974), Abraham Lincoln is reported to have greeted Beecher Stowe as “the little lady who started this great war” (972). There is controversy over this statement and in the introduction to Mary Reichardt’s 2009 edition of the novel, she refers to the same situation as an “apocryphal” (xxiii). However, Reichardt recognizes that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* “played a major role in influencing the nation’s debate on slavery” (xiv), referring to the crowd’s spontaneous acclamation of Beecher Stowe when Lincoln delivered the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1st 1863.

reading programs like Changing Lives Through Literature (hereafter referred to as CLTL) presented in Chapter One could be considered as offering contemporary examples both of the narratives and their potential influence, and I wanted to know more about the strong connections between minds and movies that permit new perspectives and create new worldviews. However, as the work developed, the simple story concept gained other dimensions. It was extended to the texts written by volunteers as they tried to explain strong connections with movies, since these normally followed a direct narrative format even when dealing with complex issues. It grew to embrace the free-flowing style of the personal and powerful narratives written about connections between movies and viewers, whether these were initial responses to an enquiry into films that had marked volunteers' lives, free associative film criticism or self-reporting, open-answer questionnaire responses.

Curiously, though I was not thinking about Langston Hughes "Simple Stories" when I started to use the expression, volunteers' free associative film analyses and some answers to longer questionnaires reminded me of Donna Akiba Sullivan Harper's appraisal of Langston Hughes's achievements with his "Simple Stories". Sullivan Harper claims that by reducing his plots to the significant conversation between two men, independently of education and social condition, Hughes stripped away barriers and conventions offering a middle ground where possibilities for developing future relationships and aspirations could be explored:

The premise of the Simple Stories appeals as the primary step in the human quest for peace, understanding, and common ground: two men from different educational and cultural backgrounds meet on an equal plane [a corner bar], exchange ideas, develop a friendship and bridge the gap between them. Each society has its own barriers, whether they be barriers of education, gender, class, sexual preference, or physical ability. By observing Simple and Boyd, readers vicariously experience themselves overcoming barriers in their own world, reaching out to someone different, and finding in that person a friend. (Sullivan Harper 1995:7)

Though, she recognizes that maintaining the dialogue within a single community, Hughes did not address all the issues, I was still fascinated by Sullivan Harper's idea that reading and contemplating Simple and Boyd's "simple" dialogues helped an emergent generation of African Americans to understand what their identity could become in a changing society. Considering initial volunteer responses and bearing Holland's and Sullivan Harper's comments in mind, I wondered if a neutral space could be developed (without the constraints of social and cultural conditioning that is like

Hughes's corner bar) where a deep reflection of personal connections with films addressing issues relevant to individual viewers could be achieved, and if this could assist them to understand their roles and identities in contemporary society. Consequently, this research increasingly aspired to learn to identify fictional narrative formats that could facilitate the building of bridges to new futures and encourage this kind of writing by volunteers.

While the approach used in free associative film criticism tends to facilitate this type of encounter between viewer and film as it encourages an individual contact between movie and viewer, initially I was not sure how I could achieve something like this in the larger group screenings. I knew the contact would have to be more limited because of the constraints inherent in working with larger groups. However, I wanted to try to include elements in these trials that could also promote meaningful contact between movie and viewer, and also permit me to understand what kinds of elements in films might promote this type of contact. Consequently, in the group screening, I decided to use films with direct narratives offering examples of positive and/or alternative lifestyle choices in contemporary society. I added longer open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires to the psychometric scales to encourage engagement between volunteer viewers and movies.

Thus, I proposed a panel of films to volunteers on group screenings that included Cameron Crowe's *Say Anything* (1989) as well as *Elizabethtown* (2005), David Lynch's *The Straight Story* (1999), Lasse Haalstrom's *Chocolate* (2000), and Clint Eastwood's *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006). In the actual trials, *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate* were the films most frequently selected by respondents or local co-ordinators. *Say Anything* was also screened for a small repeat group. I had added *Letters from Iwo Jima* with male volunteers in mind, but as both this film and *The Straight Story* were not selected on the initial single screening trials, I eventually dropped them from the selection panel. Later, I added Vicente Amorin's *Good* (2009) for double trial seven to see how watching a film telling an equally simple but in this case confrontational story would influence anxiety levels. However, although *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate* were used extensively during the practical trials, I refrain from setting any film or set of films as the *corpus* of

this work, because many of the other films used and referred to during the practical work were not my choices, but volunteer selections⁴.

In practical terms the work is organized into four chapters supported by seven appendixes. Chapter One presents the scientific and literary theory that formed the conceptual framework. It also refers to literature programs used for social intervention, and presents the answers to an initial enquiry on films that marked volunteers' lives. Finally, it presents the core principles behind the practical work.

Chapter Two presents the theories and practises behind free associative film criticism and three practical examples of its application, each spanning a minimum of two years. It analyses the free associative film criticism method as presented by Holland, and contains a presentation of the teaching method I developed from this, as well as a review of each volunteer's work.

Chapter Three is dedicated to the collective screenings with groups that ranged in size from seven to forty participants. It discusses the results of the questionnaires completed by individual volunteers on these group trials, and presents an analysis of alterations in volunteers' anxiety levels and emotional states mediated in the short term by watching the films on their screenings. It is divided into two sections because, as the work developed, new issues were raised so that each section looks at slightly different aspects of how watching movies might influence anxiety levels and emotional states. Section one records alterations in anxiety levels in volunteer groups who watched one film, while section two shows the results of groups who watched more than one movie. Some volunteers on double screening trials watched similar types of movies, others different kinds. Changes in anxiety levels were measured using the STAI psychometric scales and emotional states by long-answer self-reporting questionnaires. Chapters Two and Three are longer than the other chapters because they either contain complete translated version of volunteers' work or many tables and graphs to illustrate overall results.

Chapter Four reports work with individual volunteers. The methods blended and expanded on all the techniques applied in the previous chapters. In the Conclusion, I bring together the results of the practical trials discussed in the previous chapters and

⁴ Initial volunteers selections ranged from animated classics like Algar & Armstrong's *Bambi* (1942), to box office hits like Nick Cassavetes's *The Notebook* (2004) and Sean Penn's *Into the Wild* (2007) or more challenging movies like Paul Haggis's *Crash* (2004) and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) and free associative analysis volunteers worked with films ranging from melodramas such as, Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959) to romantic comedies like Emile Ardolino's *Dirty Dancing* (1987).

examine them in light of spawning literary and academic theory, in order to observe generalized trends and tendencies and look towards possible future developments. As the working methods changed, so did my role in the work. In Chapter Two I learned to apply and teach a film analysis method, in Chapter Three, I observed reactions to encounters with films. In Chapter Four the approach was more specially directed to additional purposes that will be defined later.

The seven appendixes are digital versions of volunteers' original writings. Appendix 1 contains initial volunteers' responses to an enquiry about a film or films that had marked their lives. Compilations of free associative literary criticism texts can be found in appendixes 2, 3, 7 and 8. Most of the free associative analysis texts were written in Portuguese, but there were some exception, since Alana wrote in English and Aida wrote some texts in Portuguese and others in English. When quoting volunteers' writings in my thesis, I translated their texts into English. Appendixes 4, 5 and 6 contain digitalized versions of volunteers' handwritten open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires. While the appendixes contain the original Portuguese version, whenever I quote volunteers' writings in my thesis, I use my own translations of their texts into English. I compiled the seven appendixes in one document with a continuous pagination system. Therefore, when I quote from appendixes, I refer to them in the following manner (Ap: page number). Volunteers' identities were always protected. Writings in appendix one are identified numerically. Free associative film analysis volunteers chose a pseudo-name beginning with the letter A, and so became Aida, Anna, Anita and Alana. I excluded information that was not pertinent to the project or that might reveal information on volunteers' identity, when I formatted these texts. I referred to volunteers on group screenings using alphanumeric references like A7 or BC3.

Having made this brief overview of the objectives of the research and presentation of the work, Chapter One will present the thinking behind the conceptual framework in more detail. It will also demonstrate how the particular tools used in the practical trials were selected.

Chapter One

Conceptual Framework and Developing Working Methods

1.1 Why do we read books and watch movies?

As already mentioned, studying the connections between minds and movies led me to question why we as human beings connect with fictional stories in the first place. I investigated areas as diverse as literary studies, psychoanalytical literary criticism, neuropsychology, cognitive sciences and neurobiology to address this query. This search amplified my expectations for the project and formed a theoretic and scientific framework that led to the selection of specific instruments including free associative film analysis, psychometric scales and open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires which I then went on to use in my practical research. Therefore, I think it is appropriate that I briefly present the research path I trod before I move on to the discussion of the tools used practically.

I started this section of the work looking at how literary studies traditionally attribute value to narrative objects. This is normally ascribed to features inherent in the literary work such as originality and coherence of plot, well-constructed characters and the use of language among others. Following this line of argument in *Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense* (1983), Perrine and Arp proposed that readers interact with literary objects according to their quality and the maturity of readers' minds. These authors classify literature into two broad categories: literature of escape and literature of interpretation. They refer to the former as entertaining, and regard its ability to help readers escape the pressures of daily life its greatest advantage. They consider the latter as more challenging and rewarding in intellectual terms.

Perrine and Arp propose that the narrative structure in escape literature is popular and comforting to readers because of the set formulas followed, including heroes, heroines and happy endings. In the authors' opinion, these offer pleasant and/or exciting images of the world, flattering readers' potential projections of self-image while bringing entertainment and release. They consider that all fictional texts that employ these formulas, no matter how original or well written they are, should be classified as literature of escape. They concede that while some writings in this category include exemplars of cheap and trite literature, they also acknowledge that others can be "original, witty, absorbing, beautifully written and artistically constructed" (7). Therefore, though they recognize that escape literature has advantages and at least at times high quality, which explains its appeal to readers, the general tone of Perrine and

Arp's writings leave the impression that it is not proper to think highly of escape literature.

Conversely, these authors valorise literature of interpretation, which they claim aspires not so much to entertain readers as to broaden and sharpen perspectives. They propose that interpretation literature achieves this purpose by using two principle mechanisms. In terms of content, it deals with significant issues. In terms of form, it refuses to follow set plot formats and rarely offers happy endings. Therefore, it encourages reflection on the substance of the text rather than on its outcome, thereby expanding readers understanding and awareness of external issues.

Perrine and Arp also categorize readers into two types: immature and discriminating. From their perspective, immature readers are drawn to literature of escape. Moreover, when and if they read literature of interpretation, they will look for or construct escape literature characteristics like heroes and favourable self - and world-views. Discriminating readers, on the other hand, generally prefer literature of interpretation, although they may also enjoy high quality literature of escape. These authors permit that immature readers may develop their ability to appreciate more demanding literature but, while they are in the immature phase, they will read all texts in this way regardless of their literary form. Thus, Perrine and Arp accredit the attraction of a literary text to content, form as well as structure, and its correct interpretation to the maturity of the reader's mind. In their model, mind and book are presented as separate objects and readers' maturity is a result of training and academic education.

Adding principals from his field, psychoanalytical literary critic Norman Holland offers different arguments to the subject of literary interpretation and the connections between books and readers. Throughout his long and active academic career, Holland expended much effort investigating how understanding one's creative writing processes or free associative literary criticism from a psychoanalytical perspective might assist readers and writers understand, not only their characteristic interactions with narrative fiction, but also unique identity theme or singular way of interacting with the world. *Poems in Persons* (1973), *5 Readers Reading* (1975) and *The Brain of Robert Frost: A Cognitive Approach to Literature* (1988) are just some examples of Holland's publications in this field. Perhaps the most relevant to free associative literary criticism is *5 Readers Reading* where Holland built identity profiles for his five reading volunteers based on reading their free associative interpretations of set literary texts from a psychoanalytical perspective. He used Heinz Lichtenstein's proposal of unique identity

theme as a theoretical framework against which he constructed identity profiles. He proposes that readers interact with fictional narratives individually, not because of education or even the form of the text, but rather because of each reader's distinctive way of interacting with the world or unique identity theme¹. In Holland's theory, readers and viewers can become aware of their unique identity theme by analysing their free associative literary or film criticism using psychoanalytical principles.

Holland originally developed the free associative literary criticism method together with Murray Schwartz in the 1970s, while they were both working in the English Department at the Centre for the Psychological Study of the Arts in the State University of New York, Buffalo. Holland and Schwartz published the results of the original experiment in the article "The Delphi Seminar" (1975). Recently, they presented the conceptual framework, operating principles and instructions on teaching the method against the background of recent developments in the scientific and literary fields in *Know Thyself: Delphi Seminars* (2008). Holland transfers the use of the free associative tool to film criticism in *Meeting Movies* (2006).

In *Meeting Movies* Holland moves away from the theoretical construction of an identity theme and aspires to assist viewers gain a greater understanding of themselves by pursuing their connections to films that have *met* them using free associative film analysis. Reviewers do not need to understand psychoanalytical principles to gain self awareness; they merely have to allow the free associative film criticism strings to flow naturally into rational thought. Holland analyses all types of films from classics to pieces of fluff, but the process and the relevance of the contact is the same, irrespective of the type of film reviewed. All the films reviewed permit Holland, as the reviewer, to gain self awareness. The film and the viewer are intimately connected, and form is of no relevance because the purpose is: "To meet a movie is to meet oneself, and that is what I am inviting you to do" (14). Thus, Holland sees the film and viewer as intimately linked. Importantly, the former can reveal identity concepts to the latter.

While maintaining his unique identity theme interpretative framework in *Meeting Movies*, Holland also uses more general psychoanalytical ideas about why viewers interact with films. When reviewing Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942), Holland asks why some films become timeless classics and others do not. He asks why audiences

¹ Psychoanalyst Heinz Lichtenstein's unique identity theme theory and Holland's use of it in his interpretation of free associative literary and film analysis will be presented more comprehensively in the next section of this chapter.

respond perpetually and globally to *Casablanca*. To answer this question, he initially refers to how scholars and critics have ascribed the film's popularity to technical constructs "in" the film (such as the originality of the screenplay, the elegance of the editing, its nostalgia, wit, charm and the tightly constructed plot) as Perrine and Arp might have done. However, he quickly rejects this alternative as an incomplete solution when he asks "Do people *love* that neatness?" and answers this statement wryly, "I doubt it" (Holland 2006a: 18). As a result of analysing *Casablanca* free associatively, Holland proposes that one of the reasons why popular films achieve this status is because they allow viewers to "achieve their millions of differing defensive patterns²." (35)

Using a psychoanalytical point of view Holland holds that onscreen events are processed in the same way as real world events at a defense mechanism level. From this perspective, he claims when watching movies, viewers engage actively, but at an unconscious level, with circumstances outside their normal field of experience. Holland further suggests that if the process appeases individual defense mechanism systems, watching a movie becomes an enjoyable experience, even if the viewer is not aware at a conscious level why this is. This proposal offers an explanation for why watching a movie can be both an individual and a collective one. Viewers' living experiences and defense mechanism systems reflect not only their own individual lives, but their social environment as well. Thus some reactions to a movie may be commonly shared, while others are specific to an individual, since these are mediated through the individuals' personal defence mechanisms. It also offers an explanation for why some films are

² Though Sigmund Freud introduced the idea of defense mechanisms to the intellectual debate in his essay "The Neuropsychosis of Defence" (1894) and used this in some other publications, he later dropped it. However, his daughter, Anna Freud, recovered it and defined it more fully in her publication *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (1936). She classified defense mechanisms as the earliest representation of the dynamic nature of psychoanalytical theory. Considering that they describe the ego's struggle against painful or unendurable ideas and affects, they allow individuals to deal successfully with circumstances in their daily lives that would otherwise be very painful or difficult. The original ten defense mechanisms she defined nearly eighty years ago are not so different to those presented today. They were regression, repression, reaction formation, isolation, undoing, projection, introjections, turning against the self, reversal and sublimation.

When contextualizing this topic as it is understood and applied today, Susan Krauss Whitbourne remains faithful to Anna Freud's central proposals in her article "The Essential Guide to Defense Mechanisms: Can you spot your favorite form of self-deception?" (2011) on the *Psychology Today* blog. She presents nine defense mechanisms: denial, regression, repression, reaction formation, displacement, projection, intellectualization, rationalization and sublimation. Following a line of argumentation very similar to that presented by Anna Freud, Whitbourne proposes that defense mechanisms are beneficial in everyday life because they protect individuals from the anxiety of confronting their weaknesses and foibles, safeguarding them from processing feelings and thoughts that are too difficult for the conscious mind to cope with. Thus, they keep inappropriate or unwanted thoughts and impulses from entering the conscious mind.

popular at a given time within a certain social context, and others have a more universal appeal. If a fictional narrative appeases defense systems laid down because of cultural education at a given time, they may appeal to that community strongly at the time. Others that soothe more timeless defense systems may remain classics over the ages.

As all these reactions occur at an unconscious defense mechanism level, Holland suggests for the movie going experience to have a lasting effect on viewers, and for them to understand why they connect with certain movies, they have to reflect on the film. Simply watching a movie works on the viewers' unconscious activating individual defense mechanisms, but viewers have to think about their connections with films to understand these at a conscious level. This contemplation will also help viewers to explore their own anxieties and understand their own as well as other ways (those presented by the characters) of dealing with specific issues. Thus, viewers can gain insight into how their defense mechanisms would deal with hypothetical situations. This can be particularly relevant if these are presented from different geographical, temporal or cultural contexts.

In *Literature and the Brain* (2009),³ Holland looks at neurobiological, as well as psychoanalytical processes in his attempt to understand connections between literature and the receptor. He again establishes that defense mechanisms deal with literary objects in the same way that they contend with real live events. Thus, they may lead viewers to reject the story told:

So long as we are engaged, as readers or audiences, with a literary work, those same forms [defense mechanisms] become our way to handle that reality. They permit us to perceive some things and not others. They direct our attention and perception on the basis of what is new or “defamiliarized”. We can, of course, opt out, but so long as we commit ourselves to a story, poem, film or drama, *form functions in our experience of literature and media as defenses do in life.* (Holland 2009: 156)

Holland holds that it is important to remember that when they permit or encourage engagement with a fictional narrative, they are not neutral filters as they will colour the interpretation of the text as they also colour interactions with real world events. He even proposes defense mechanisms may lead readers and viewers to “misread” fictional texts

³ As *Meeting Movies* is dedicated solely to film analysis, it is not surprising that it speaks about defense mechanism activation as a consequence of watching movies. However in *Literature and the Brain*, when Holland discusses the impact of literature on defense mechanisms and the human mind and brain, he includes all types of fictional narratives, from TV soap operas to high literature, in this category. Therefore, from this point onwards, when discussing these topics I will be referring to the literary within this wider context.

if these present situations that cause emotional discomfort. Holland agrees with Krauss Whitbourne proposal in “The Essential Guide to Defense Mechanisms” (2011) that these are constructed to help the individual avoid reflection on situations and events that may be painful for them:

If inner defense and outer form do not match, which is master? Inner. I and other reader-response critics have shown again and again that individual readers will shape and edit what they see, hear or read to suit their own inner psychological needs, ‘misreading’ as need be. If readers cannot succeed, they cannot enjoy the work, and they reject it. (Holland 2009: 163)

Thus, in this interpretation, readers’ individual defense mechanism systems are automatically and unconsciously brought into play to understand the interaction between external object and internal entity. If, as Holland claims, these may lead to misinterpretation, readers and viewers need to analyze their reactions to fictional narratives to gain insight into their “natural” reactions, perhaps provoked by defenses.

Holland employs neurobiological theory to support his claims in *Literature and the Brain*. He used the somatic marker theory to explain how these automatic defense system reactions might occur at a physical level.⁴ Principally somatic markers can be interpreted as memories stored in the body/mind that lead to reactionary, automatic reactions (*cf.* Damasio 1996). Holland suggests that people enjoy fiction when it evokes unconscious signals stirring up visceral reactions in the body that produce pleasure reactions. If the literary object triggers unconscious signals that harmonise positively with inner defences, the outcome is enjoyment. However, the contrary is also true in this model and if the fictional narrative evokes displeasure, the inner defences will cause the reader either to reject or to misread the literary object:

If inner defense and outer form do not match, which is the master? I and other reader-response critics have shown again and again that individual readers will shape and edit what they see, hear or read to suit their own inner psychological needs “misreading” as need be. If readers cannot succeed, they cannot enjoy the work, and they reject it.

Then, *for you or me to enjoy a literary work, the outer form that directs our awareness of the work must enact for us defenses that combine effectively with the defenses characteristic for each of us individually as we seek to avoid unpleasure and gain pleasure in everyday life.* (2009: 163).

This proposal again raises the issue of the importance of the discussion of reactions to fictional narratives, because according to Holland’s theory, readers and

⁴ Antonio Damasio’s somatic marker theory will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

viewers are not aware, at a conscious level, of misinterpreting texts if this is caused by defense mechanism activation. In Holland's models⁵, these misinterpretations are reinforced by (or perhaps even caused by) visceral reactions (somatic markers) which lead readers and viewers, at a physical level, to reject situations that have the potential to prove displeasure for them:

[...] long-term memory relevant for our literary expectations *emotional learning* or *conditioning*. [...] these 'somatic markers' that translated into cognitive hunches and 'gut feelings' and what Freud called 'signals of unpleasure.' (Holland 2009: 135).

[...] *these long-term, nonverbal emotional memory systems govern how we feel as we create or experience literature in our characteristic way*. For example, previous negative experiences of Lady Macbeth will probably lead us to feel her first entrance differently from, say, Cordelia's (136).

Holland further explores how somatic markers may lead readers and viewers to interact with specific literary and filmic characters differently. He writes about his automatic negative gut reaction, to the actor Malcolm McDowell after watching his portrayal of Alex in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), and proposes that our previous "experience" of these characters may prime us to anticipate a certain reaction when encountering them again (*cf.* Holland: 135-6).

Holland's use of somatic markers to explain how memories "remembered" by the body may lead people to react to fictional narratives through a personal interpretative shield is faithful to neurobiologist, Antonio Damasio's proposals on the subject. Damasio started to write about somatic markers after analyzing the results of a series of experiments, called the Iowa Gambling Task, that he and his team developed to gain insight into how lesions in the ventromedial frontal brain lobes affect patient's ability to develop appropriate risk prevention strategies. Patients with the aforementioned lesion and healthy volunteers participated equally. All the participants were wired to sensors to detect changes in bodily states and asked to play a card game where they had to take cards from different decks. As the game progressed, participants learned that some decks offered the potential for large losses or gains, the others lesser. Patients with the ventromedial frontal brain lobe lesions chose from the high risk/gain deck more often and lost more heavily during the course of the game. However, the sensors detected that bodily and emotionally they were unaffected by their choices and the outcomes of these. Conversely, players without this lesion showed bodily evidence of avoidance emotions

⁵ These ideas are particularly explained in *Literature and the Brain* (2009), Part III "Enjoying" (143-162)

when thinking about drawing from the high risk/gain desk. Investigators detected that they developed cerebral and bodily schemas which could be referred to as hunches or gut reactions respectively that led them to avoid risk. Damasio classified this combination of body/brain activity/reaction as somatic markers.⁶

Though I will explain this concept in more detail later in this chapter, I would like to refer to Damasio's concise and comprehensive explanation of the conceptualization of this theory in *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain* (2004), as this is very appropriate to Holland's use of the concept:

When the [emotional] signal is overt it produces automated alarm signals relative to options of action that are likely to lead to negative outcomes. A gut feeling can suggest that you refrain from a choice that, in the past, has led to negative consequences, and it can do so ahead of your own regular reasoning telling you precisely the same "Do not". The emotional signal can also produce the contrary of an alarm signal, and urge the rapid endorsement of a certain option because, in the system's history, it has been associated with a positive outcome. In brief, the signal *marks* options and outcomes with a positive or negative signal that narrows the decision making space and increases the probability that the action will conform to past experience. Because the signals are, in one way or another body-related, I began referring to this set of ideas as 'the somatic-marker hypothesis' (Damasio 2004: 147-148)

So, somatic markers appear to protect the body from potential danger and prime it to repeat beneficial actions. Damasio's work and other similar experiments led Holland to propose that, in healthy readers and viewers, experiences obtained through contact with fictional narratives are stored in the body/brain in the same way that reactions to real world events are. Thus, readers and viewers previous experience of fictional characters may lead these characters to be treated in different manners. Holland's examples may explain how he feels his somatic markers induce his body to reject future representations of Alex, and these contributed to the production of defense mechanisms that lead him to misread or reject situations that could potentially cause him discomfort.

If Holland's proposals are extended beyond the reaction to the actor or character portrayed and expanded to include reactions to scenes and attitudes exhibited in fictional narratives, one may argue that first, reading books and watching movies truly expands the total living experience. Second, that reflective consideration of reactions to connections with books and films might permit readers and viewer to consider concepts they would naturally reject. Readers and viewers should reflect on their reactions to fictional characters because these may be caused by unconscious triggers. Deep reading and

⁶ Damasio presented this experiment in *Descartes' Error* (1994), Chapter 9: "Testing the Somatic Marker Hypothesis".

reflection are vital for the individual to become aware of what is happening at an unconscious level. These ideas suggest that while books and films are separate entities to readers and viewers, these are processed **through** readers' and viewers' minds and lives. They gain a transitional and transformational capacity for readers and viewers when they bring the whole power of their minds and lives to understanding not only the book or film but also personal reactions to these. In this case, the literary experience is not limited to free associative film analysis, though this tool may be used, but it can apply to all reflective contact with literature and film. It is not merely limited to the books and films that meet us, so by its nature the contact is different.

Experimental psychologist Richard Gerrig's work, presented in *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading* (1998), supports the ideas that the interaction between books/films and readers/viewers is processed through minds and lives. Gerrig proposed that readers have to invoke their living experience in order to enjoy fictional narratives to their fullest. He suggested that literature only becomes alive to readers when they delve into their own living experience to connect with the words on the page. To illustrate this point he referred to different literary texts, including Don DeLillo's arousing description of a mystery man riding the subway in the opening chapter of *Libra* (1991). Gerrig proposes that the words on the page only gain real life when readers add their own experience of moving quickly, etc. to the text: "The conclusion is a general one: whenever we attend a movie, watch television or read a newspaper, we are actively supplementing the 'text.'" (Gerrig 1998:29)

Gerrig also analyzed the cognitive processes associated with reading different types of narratives from a cognitive psychology perspective. He and his team elaborated tests that observed how readers reacted to different types of texts. In one trial volunteers read various short texts about historical events or figures. Some used historically accurate information; others added improbable fictional events. In another trial the historical stories were constructed so the facts were presented in a sequence that was in keeping with contemporary understanding of what the real world events would have been at the time; in others the presentation did not follow today's usual perception of the person or event. In another trial, Gerrig and his team wrote two versions of a short story, which volunteers were informed was fictional before reading. The two stories shared a plot but, as they developed, different patterns were followed. In one version, the plot developed in a manner replicating real world possibilities, in the other it followed improbable contours.

Observing readers' reactions to the different types of texts, Gerrig proposed that volunteers physically process fictional and non-fictional accounts using similar cognitive mechanisms. However, when the story confronts readers' perceptions of what could be true in that situation, their reactions changed. Gerrig concludes his arguments on how fictional stories are processed, proposing:

On the whole, therefore, I believe that many critical properties of narrative worlds emerge directly from the ordinary and obligatory operation of basic cognitive processes. I offer this conclusion partially as an antidote to theories that have treated narrative experiences in isolation. In some sense, all a reader has to do to be transported to a narrative world is to have in place the repertory of cognitive processes that is otherwise required for everyday experience.

[...] I have also suggested that readers might strategically undertake a 'willing construction of disbelief.' My claim has been that the only experimental distinctions between fiction and non-fiction are those that readers effortfully construct. [...] I have argued for the unity of fiction and non-fiction. [...] I suggested that all information is understood as true until some is unaccepted. My general conclusion is that fictions will fail to have a real-world impact only if readers extend explicit effort to understand them as fictional (Gerrig 1998: 239 – 240).

Thus, Gerrig proposes that readers also use their normal cognitive processing system to make sense of a literary text and to decide if they can believe what they read is true.

Therefore, it is readers' inherent validation systems, based we presume on their past living experience, that will recognize if a story can be true or not, unless they are informed at the beginning of a task that they are reading fiction. I interpreted Gerrig's proposals in the following manner: for instance, if I pick up a novel or sit down to watch a movie, my past living experience tells me that I will be engaging in a fictional world. I know before I begin the activity that I will be processing fiction. However, if a work colleague gives me a text to read and tells me that it is a report, I will treat it as such, unless my past living experience shows me that it is written in a way that could not be true or it contains facts that could not be accurate. Also, if I get so absorbed in a film or a book that I involve myself in its world totally, my bodily/cognitive systems will treat this as my real world, until the story presents something that my validating systems reject. It is this rejection, based on past living experience that informs me that my bodily processing systems have been dealing with a fictional world. The same cognitive processes are used to process each text, but past living experience tells me what to do with the information.

Gerrig's logic reinforced Holland's proposals that there are at least two distinct but interrelated processes at play when we engage in physical worlds. The first perhaps are physical/biological mechanisms that produce the same cognitive procedures that enable one to process factual and fictional stories. The second could be emotive and rationalization systems that respond to the text and verify its potential authenticity.

While Gerrig looked at the cognitive process, in *Literature and the Brain*, Holland refers to the physical brain activity associated with processing fictional narratives. He agrees with Gerrig that despite the popular perception that books and films do something to their readers and viewers, the situation is actually reversed, and people process or "do" literature. "Literature is a human thing. Only humans do it and apparently all humans do it" (2009: 321), he writes. Obviously, this processing occurs at different levels. He concludes that, physically, brains work differently while processing fictional narratives. They turn off systems that are used during daily life and others are activated to process fiction:

If I [Holland] look back at the various brain changes when we do literature, I see one overarching principle. *When we experience literature, we turn brain systems on and off in ways that we do not in ordinary life.* In real life, we do not separate the "what" from the "where", we do not stop testing reality, we do not inhibit planning for action, and we do not give free rein to our wish-fulfilling fantasies, except when we are daydreaming. With literature, we take pleasure in something that gives us only imaginary gratifications. In short, when reading and creating literature, we use our brains very differently than when we are simply taking a walk, shopping at the mall, meeting lovers, or any of our daily activities directed to survival and reproduction. (322)

So, in Holland's opinion, when processing literature readers turn off the processes that would produce the physical responses required if the same circumstances were presented by real world events. But Holland asks why we engage with literature if "doing" it uses different brain processes to real world events. As such, it should not bestow any evolutionary advantage for regular life.

Holland concludes that there must be some biological advantage to encourage engaging in the alternative operational system required to process fictional narratives. After all, this is physically complex and "Natural selection makes advantageous behaviours pleasurable" (322). While Holland recognizes that literature is expected to do more than just give pleasure, he suggests perhaps it is this spontaneous enjoyment that encourages readers to engage repeatedly in this activity. He writes, "We create and re-create literature because we enjoy it. It gives us pleasure" (342-3). Therefore, Holland proposes that readers embark on the physically complex process of reading because they

know they will be able to enjoy scenarios without having to take action. In his theory, pleasure and relaxation are not to be taken lightly as they are the principle factors leading not just to the popularity, but also to the survival of reading. In light of Damasio's somatic marker theory, one could perhaps even propose that this expectation of enjoyment from reading may be primed by positive somatic markers.

Holland then goes on to suggest that after literature and the arts in general have offered pleasure, they can then go on to serve superior purposes. However, this requires both reflective thought and that readers make sense of art and literature within the contexts of their own lives:

Literature and art, I believe achieve their "higher" purpose only when we think about them. Merely reading or going to museums and concerts is not enough. Something more is needed, and that something more is thinking in our ordinary way about the experience of art and literature we have just had. (343)

Holland even suggests that different types of written texts not normally associated with the literary, like political speeches and collections of street signs etc., can become "literary" if readers decide to treat them as such and read them first for enjoyment and not as a means of obtaining practical information. In Holland's view, a text becomes literary when readers "agree to treat a thing as literature and to enjoy it as it as literature. [...] What makes literature literature, then, and art art, is not some property of the objects themselves but *us*." (343)

This proposal disagrees with Widdowson's suggestion that something **in** the text makes it literary. Holland suggests that a text becomes literary when readers decide to enter a receptive mode, expecting to be entertained when engaging with the object. However, as Holland goes on to explain the different stages of interaction he proposes between reader and text, it becomes evident that it should be easier to interact with fictional narratives in this manner, than more factual texts. Thus, from Holland's perspective, literature's first function is to offer pleasure/relaxation. When readers engage with it they expect to obtain these, knowing that no active input on their part will be required. Because a fictional narrative is an external object, the brain deals with the literary encounter at a biological level in the same way that it processes real world events. However, Holland also proposes that to truly enjoy fictional narratives, independently of their simplicity or complexity, readers must make sense of them within the context of their own lives:

Finally, to enjoy a literary work, we need to make some kind of sense out of it. All of this gives us a sense of mastery. We take pleasure in first passively experiencing, then integrating into our regular mental processing a world that makes as much and maybe more sense than our real one. (346)

The fact that readers have decided to treat a text as literary means that, at a cognitive level, they are aware that they are processing a fictional object, so they know they will not have to take real actions to provide solutions for potentially threatening situations. At this phase of enjoyment (or lack of it) depending on defense mechanism activation and somatic markers arousal stemming from being exposed to particular scenes evoked by the fictional narrative, the audience decides (or not) to engage with the literary work. For engagement to occur, they have to reflect on the text and make sense of the events portrayed within the context of their own life, so they will use their experiences to make the text come to life for them.

However, in Holland's model a third level of contact is necessary for literature to fulfil its highest purpose. He claims that readers must go beyond enjoyment and even absorbing information transmitted as it makes sense in their own lives, because these activities are still linked to the processing of the events described in the fictional world in accordance with individual defense mechanisms and somatic markers. To get beyond instinctive/natural reactions, readers and viewers must hover over texts, reflecting on ideas and concepts that lie behind the actual scenes transmitted, and perhaps even reflect on why certain characters or situations or literary forms are rejected "automatically". In this way Holland holds the literary text can truly expand the readers' living experience, permitting them to contemplate situations and psychological dilemmas that their personal and cultural education may not have equipped them for:

To enjoy a literary work fully, we "make sense" of it. At the most rudimentary level, we fit literary works into our everyday mental processing. The sitcom ends, we find the ending satisfactory, we turn off the television, and we go to bed. But this is the least of "making sense." If we are experiencing literature wholly, we reflect. We need to let our minds float, as it were somewhere above that literal level. We do not take away simple lessons, like what to do if your uncle murders your father and marries your mother. Reading *Hamlet*, I come face to face, as the Prince does, with a task too large for me, that complicated play itself. How will I respond? Will I feel crazy? Betrayed? Will I, as he does, write a play of my own? Will I, as he does, dither and dilly-dally and finally say, 'Let Providence take care of it?'

In short, when we make a literary work mean, when we make it make *more* sense than mere coherence, we confront the strange perplexities of life itself? Instead of answers, we find questioning. Experiencing those questions seems to me precisely Horace's *prodesse*.

This, I think, is what Milton meant when he asked that readers bring ‘a spirit and judgement equal or superior’ to what they are reading. (358)

Thus, while our defense mechanisms and somatic markers may lead readers and viewers to misread or reject representations in literature and film, discussion and reflective thought can first, correct this and permit interaction with situations that bodies and educations may have primed for avoidance or misconstruction. These interactions can lead to the contemplation of realities outside the readers’ or viewers’ personal living experience.

Curiously, before reading Holland’s ideas I experienced the results of “hovering” that he described while partaking in a graduate literature seminar. Deep reading and personal reflection on the moral dilemmas Huck Finn faced in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) gave me glimpses of how poverty, abuse and neglect might hinder the development of fledgling consciousness and social morality, not only for one brought up as Huck had been, but also more generally. This reflection gave me an unusual and unexpected insight into the problems inherent in being raised in social neighbourhoods and spawning shanty towns today. My dialogues with Huck’s dilemmas permitted me to contemplate circumstances and events outside my personal and cultural education, and I would imagine unforeseen by Twain. Hovering over these texts allowed me to see issues from perspectives different to those inherited in my personal and cultural identity.

In his reflections, Holland describes different types of literary experiences, he does not refer to different categories of literature or readers as Perrine and Arp had done (1983). This is probably due to the fact that Holland proposes that different types of texts require different levels of concentration and brain activity, rather than different types of readers. When considering how the mind interacts with a TV soap opera (which, in principle, would be considered as one of Perrine and Arp’s simplest forms of literature of escape), Holland comments that this may be satisfying simply because it is relaxing and allows viewers to personally make sense of the story in an easy and comforting manner, since “we find the ending satisfactory, we turn off the television, and we go to bed”. (Holland 2009: 358) Enjoying and understanding the soap opera does not require viewers to hover over it. It is relaxing and requires less input on the part of the viewer than great literature: “[...] ‘high’ or ‘great’ literature is literature that allows us a greater and different range of activity in our brain system” (359).

Thus, while Holland's categories of low and high literature are broadly comparable to Perrine and Arp's literature of escape and interpretation, there is a great difference in the way each scholar sees the reader. While Perrine and Arp insist that only mature readers can read and accurately interpret literature of interpretation, Holland makes no such categorization of the reader. He concedes that interpreting Proust involves bringing "the intimate progress of our thought and the effort of our hearts to literary work" (Holland 2009:357). Therefore, it is more intellectually stimulating and enriching than reading light fiction or watching a "piece of fluff". However, Holland insists that both forms of literature can be processed by the same mind. The "brain system" available may have as much to do with the individual's physical condition at the time of reading as with his or her actual ability to read and interpret a text. For instance, at the end of the day literary scholars may have difficulty processing a complex text just because they are tired. Nonetheless, they may benefit greatly from watching or reading a simple narrative of escape. Likewise, given time and orientation someone normally not used to reading complex literature of interpretation may learn to do so.

Intriguingly, Holland uses homeostasis⁷ another concept born in psychoanalysis but used extensively in neuroscience to explain his thinking on the construction of personal and cultural identities. Biologically, Holland defines homeostasis as the organism's drive "to maintain a stable internal environment in spite of environmental variations and disturbances" (2009: 219). Within the context of identity, Holland considers homeostasis as "the relentless drive of each being to maintain itself as itself" (219). However, identity also has a collective side and Holland proposed that a "culture brings up its children so that they can live in that culture" (218). Therefore, it is very plausible that as well as acquiring somatic markers and defense mechanisms due to individual living experience, some may be laid down as a result of social conditioning.

We can see examples of this conditioning when we cross cultural boundaries. Personally, I find it difficult to watch Spanish bullfighting, but I enjoy foxhunting. Logically, foxhunting is actually more brutal than bullfighting, but I was brought up raising fox hounds and watching brothers going to the hunt. My collective and personal living experience informed me that fox hunting was pleasurable, exhilarating and even relaxing, so I have no negative somatic markers regarding this activity. Only discussion of the practise with others, who had not been brought up within a social context where

⁷ Later in this chapter, neuroendocrinologist, Robert Sapolsky's work on stress will be reviewed regarding how simply reading for pleasure might contribute to cellular homeostasis.

foxhunting is a good and acceptable sport, led to re-evaluate my position about it. These reflections again encourage one to think that reflective contact with fictional narratives might be able to play a powerful role, demonstrating attitudes that have merely been imbibed from cultural inheritance and permit the construction of new thought patterns independent of this.

Holland's arguments based on psychoanalytical theory and practise and neuroscientific introduce many curious ideas, not least reinforcing the notions presented by Gerrig that our contact with fictional narratives occurs at various levels. The principal ideas I took from this investigation are first, that we read books and watch movies with our whole bodies and that fictional narratives are processed through biological systems spread throughout the reader's/viewer's system. Also, somatic markers and defense mechanisms can lead to misinterpret a text or a film. Thus, in interpretation, a book or a film is never just a neutral object outside the reader's/viewer's mind and life because we read books and watch movies **through** our mental processes, biological systems **and** past living experience social and cultural consciousness. Understanding our connections to books and films, whether pursued by free associative analysis or other methods might permit increased awareness and perhaps even acceptance of self and as such should be encouraged.

Moreover, while somatic markers, defense mechanisms and thought patterns acquired from education may all lead readers to misinterpret texts, deep reflection on texts, their discussion and analysis may permit correction and introduction of new ideas. Finally, following the exploration of unique identity theme and free associative literary analysis's capacity to reveal information on this, I was also interested in investigating if and how this tool could be used in a contemporary educational context to increase awareness and acceptance of self. Perhaps, it could be considered as a tool that would help unearth personal identity and strip away the influences of cultural identity. Therefore, I decided to look at this particular aspect of Holland's work in more detail to see if this would be a suitable tool to use in my practical research.

1.2 Free associative literary and film criticism theory

Holland's work in this area has been recognized for its focus on identity and self-awareness, within a social context and with moral concerns as Jane Tomkins pointed out in *Reader Response Criticism: from Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (1980):

Norman Holland and David Bleich put questions of personal identity and self awareness at the center of their critical theories. [...] The practical goal of their [Holland and Bleich] work is to achieve knowledge of the self, of its relation to other selves, to the world, and to human knowledge in general. Much more than other literary critics, their moral aims seem to determine the nature of their literary theories.

Norman Holland's central thesis, arrived at over a period of years, is that people deal with literary texts the same way they deal with life experience. Each person develops a particular style of coping – what Holland's calls an identity theme – which imprints itself on every aspect of his behaviour including acts of textual interpretation.

[...] Later, he [Holland] describes his epistemology, in opposition to Cartesian dualism, as one which conceives experience as 'an in-gathering and in-mixing of self and other.'" (Tomkins 1980: xix)

Thus, according to Tomkins, long before Damasio defined his somatic markers hypothesis defying Cartesian dualism, Holland was using a body-minded brain approach when trying to understand how readers interact with literary objects and how this experience influences them.

The more the study developed, the more I considered that it would be difficult to understand how fictional narratives can impact on lives, if one did not investigate their influence on both the body and the mind. For that reason, the body-minded brain and understanding how individuals' interact with external objects is the central research focus of three of the scholars who contributed to my conceptual framework. These were psychoanalyst Heinz Lichtenstein, who influenced literary scholar Norman Holland's literary analysis methods, and later neurobiologist Antonio Damasio, Free associative literary and film criticism was probably the first form of literary analysis that considered how contact with fictional narratives could influence the body-minded brain as a whole. The proposals and practices associated with this work influenced the approach used to film analysis in many sections of this work. Therefore, I consider that it is pertinent to include reflections on this method in this introductory theoretical chapter.

However, despite Holland's work, even today, a body-minded brain approach to literary interaction is still quite unusual in literary circles. This probably occurs because it

is difficult for scholars in this area to think of artistic production and appreciation in terms of bodily reactions. The creative process is seen as belonging to a higher field, governed by intangible elements that are not expected to be understood in terms of the physical and biochemical. However, as Heinz Lichtenstein explained in the Introduction to *The Dilemma of Human Identity* (1977), he looked to Freud's approach because he considered it beneficial to look at integrated bodily system when considering the complexity of human life. I felt my literary study would benefit from a body-minded brain approach also:

In the early thirties, while I [Lichtenstein] was practicing 'neuropsychiatry' in Germany, my search for a new, more integrated vision of man than existential philosophy or scientific medicine had to offer led me to the work of Freud. I sensed that there was in Freud's approach to the great contradictions of human existence, an attempt to reach beyond Cartesian dualism. (Lichtenstein 1977: 4)

From a historic perspective, Holland's work in reader-response and psychoanalytical literary criticism led him to use free associative literary criticism as an analysis tool that would help reviewers become more aware of their unique identity theme. As Tompkins (1980) observes, while Holland always appealed to identity awareness in his research and writing, his main goal seemed to be to use literary criticism to achieve knowledge of the self, of its relation to other selves, to the world, and to human knowledge in general. In his essay "Unity Identity Text Self" (1980), Holland proposed that literary criticism could demonstrate identity theme as an external unifying expression because the "*interpretation* [of literary texts] *is a function of identity*, specifically, identity conceived as variations upon an identity theme" (Holland 1980: 123).

Holland made these proposals because of the results of the free associative literary analysis he had carried out and presented in *5 Readers Reading* (1975). In *5 Readers Reading*, Holland instructed volunteers to analyse three short fictional texts free associatively: William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1930), F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Winter Dreams" (1922) and Hemingway's "The Battler" (1925). Holland asked all the volunteers to read the stories and then interviewed them individually to get their free associative reactions to the texts. Holland recorded their answers and analyzed these answers from a psychoanalytical perspective to determine if he could identify unifying principles in the interpretations. He wrote "I [Holland] brought to the interviews

themselves my belief that, for all the infinite variations in his behaviour, any individual also shows a deep and essential unity in his personality” (Holland 1975: 53).

He understood the unifying principles in volunteers’ interpretations as the way the organism reconciles various tasks within a given personality tendency: “the ego’s habitual modes of adjustment to the external world. (54)” Using this analysis and considering Lichtenstein’s proposals, he aspired to build coherent identity profiles for his readers that would define persistent attitudes and providing a picture of how the reader would be “seen” from the outside. Holland observed that in fact, “Each reader builds up an experience from a literary work that is characteristic for him, that is, a variation upon his identity theme” (286). These findings led Holland to conclude that Lichtenstein’s proposals were in fact correct. Holland embraced psychoanalyst, Heinz Lichtenstein’s concept of unique identity theme presented as a “primary identity,” or “a zero point which must precede all other mental developments” (Holland 1975: 54). According to Lichtenstein’s theory, the child develops in a kind of rhythmic oscillation as it learns to interact with the outside world through its experiences of early maternal care, and what it needs to do to have its needs satisfied. The process continues until the child sees itself as a complete entity separate from early caregivers. Holland also concurs with Lichtenstein’s proposal that the child will carry this model of interacting with the world to each new experience. Holland equated this concept of character to identity and considered that this must be seen as a constant feature influencing every phase of the individual’s life:

Whatever the solution for a particular sphere of his life, once someone had achieved it, he tends to adhere to it. And beneath any one solution lies the deeper, more tenacious, general structure of drives and adaptations that changes little, if at all, even under the greatest stresses.

To express this constancy that informs everything a human being says or does. Yeats spoke of a ‘myth’, Congreve of ‘humour’ and Charles Mauron, of a *‘mythe personnel’*. In recent years, ‘identity’ has become the most popular word to describe the modern psychoanalytical concept of character, although Erik Erikson’s ‘ego identity’ is more accurate and Heinz Lichtenstein’s ‘identity theme’ still more so. Because of the connections I [Holland] want to make between literary man and literary work, I tend to adapt an old Adlerian term and speak of ‘style’ and ‘lifestyle’ Whatever the term, however, it must convey a constancy that colors every phase of an individual’s life. It is what he brings from all his past to all new experience, and it is extremely difficult—perhaps impossible—to change. Yet, in practice, it can often be expressed quite succinctly. (56)

Thus, Holland assumes Lichtenstein’s idealization of the stable nature of unique identity theme remaining an “invariant” characteristic throughout life and reflected in the way individuals react uniquely with others, the world that surrounds them and

understanding and appreciating of literature, even when passing through different psychosocial stages:

Between the unchanging identity theme and the rapid cyclings of everyday life fall the slow cycles of psychosocial development. Though measured in years, not moments, they follow the same cybernetic pattern of active growth toward new experience assimilated into a continuing life style. In terms of multiple functioning [...]

There is change or development on the basis of change or development of the instinctual life, of the outer world, or of the superego. Hence, through the biologically predetermined development of the instinctual life other problems will approach the ego in puberty than in the period before puberty, and accordingly change all happenings in the ego, all attempted solutions. The changing of the outer world places the individual at times before changed problems. We can also speak of a development of the superego [...] becoming constantly more and more independent. (228)

Therefore, while Holland assumes Lichtenstein's proposal that these stable identity profiles, biologically determined, will play a governing role on how the self interacts with objects, whether merely external or those presented by the different psychosocial stages of development. These interactions, by their very nature, will have to be processed through the whole body systems, not separated minds and bodies.

Holland also sees reading books as involving a re-creation of the literary object in the readers' mind, identity theme living experience and individual defense mechanisms activation, another indication of whole body processing of the literary experience: "One can look at this act of re-creation as the reader's way of warding off sources of anxiety – that point of view would stress his matching his defences" (Holland 1975: 286). Regarding identity theme and defense mechanisms, from this perspective, it may be proposed that identity theme is determinant in the development of defense mechanisms produced as a result of individual and collective living experience as a social being in society and will be determinant in the way that the individual is seen from the outside. Thus, identity theme can be detected from a psychoanalytical analysis of free associative literary criticism.

These ideas were very relevant to my research questions, thus I proceeded to examine the identity profiles Holland built for his readers. Unfortunately, I was less enthusiastic about these. I found them cumbersome and they did not synergize with my original research aims. The profiles are too steeped in psychoanalytical theory for a non-specialist (as is my case) to compile or there did not seem to be any emphasis on how these might be used to achieve practical outcomes. The extract from Sam's profile presented below illustrates this point:

Sam saw the world primarily in terms of his own (and its) need for love, admiration, direction, security, and the like. He kept his own narcissistic supplies intact by two complementary adaptations, both in a way spatial. To defend against a danger, perceived as a threatening withdrawal of attention, he would, physically or psychologically, distance himself from the potential frustration. Conversely, he would draw close, physically or psychologically, to whatever would give him reassurance, control, or admiration, fusing or identifying, if need be, with such a source of nourishing love as to take it right into himself. Often, for dapper Sam, such nourishment involved wishes and fantasies that he was being loved and admired for his intact and decorous boyishness. (308)

Therefore, I discarded the idea of constructing identity profiles, but I still considered free associative film analysis and Lichtenstein's unique identity theme added valid and useful concepts to the literary analysis equation.

I discovered that after establishing grounding principles of his use of free associative literary analysis and Lichtenstein's unique identity theory, Holland used these to look at more practical questions to try to understand variables and variations in literary production and appreciation. For instance in *Laughing: A Psychology of Humor* (1982), Holland looked at the individual nature of humor and used free associative literary analysis to gain insight into how unique identity theme could influence the interpretation of literary texts, independent of their form and structure. In *The I* (1985), he investigated identity theme within the context of human nature, society, social consciousness and free will. In *The Brain of Robert Frost* (1988), he introduced cognition theories to his literary analysis, and advanced a dynamic model of mind function development. He proposed that the mind understands the world through fixed codes and flexible cannons that are derived from society and distilled through identity themes. Later, in *The Critical I* (1992), Holland attacks post-modern literary critics' claims that literature can and should be interpreted in an absolute manner. He proposes that literary studies should concentrated on the intervenients involved in literary analysis and appreciation, rather than trying to make interpretation fit into fixed models. However, while the aforementioned were interesting, I found that Holland's most relevant work for my particular research were published from 2006 onwards. They were *Meeting Movies* (2006), and *Know Thyself: The Delphi Seminars* (2008), the latter co-authored with Murray Schwartz.

Meeting Movies was Holland's first book dedicated solely to film analysis. More importantly for me while assuming that each viewer interacts with films according to their unique way of interacting with the world, it does not build identity profiles. Holland distances himself from earlier reader response criticism and declares identity awareness

as the central concept to be explored in this work and this was very relevant to my research:

Movies happen in you. ... When you see a film, when the story happens in your own head, when you merge with those gigantic figures on the screen, it feels as though you are lost in the movie. You and the movie become one ... You reach into yourself to bring out all of you, from earliest childhood to today's concerns, and connect it to the movie. (Holland 2006a: 12)

Critics pigeon-hole what I have written in the chapters that follow, as “reader-response criticism”. I think of it as “meeting” movies or books or poems. [...] To meet a movie is to meet oneself and that is what I am inviting you to do. (14)

Though referring to psychoanalytical terms and concepts when necessary, film criticism is the central focus of *Meeting Movies*. While it represents a step in a continuum of thought, including both psychoanalytical and neurobiological considerations, it coaches its suggestions in a literary format that does not require extensive knowledge of spawning theories. In this manner, it offers three main arguments. First, it suggests that experiences felt while absorbed in literature or film have real significance. Second, applying free association to fictional objects allows viewers to meet themselves, especially if viewers feel a strong connection with the films. Interpreted in light of the body of Holland’s work implies gaining a reinforced idea of identity theme.) Third, free association applied to fictional experiences provided through film or literature (as in *Meeting Movies*) may permit readers/viewers to re-evaluate not only their identity themes but also their living experience because connections with fictional events - especially when reinforced using free association - can allow readers/viewers to expand their real living experience. Therefore, films and books may become transitional and transformational objects. These ideas were very relevant for the work I wanted to follow.

Holland does not mention identity theme in *Meeting Movies*. However, the fact that he still used Lichtenstein’s as a central reference point for his literary analysis, at that time, as can be seen clearly in another essay published at the time. In “Style, Identity, Free Association and the Brian” (2006b), Holland further expanded on the idea of *identity from the outside*. Comparing identity theme to artistic production produced, and how common features can be recognized in artists’ work, he proposes that when an individual’s life is looked at “from the outside”, it can be seen as a whole, defined by a single unifying principle. A musical piece (or pieces by the same composer) may present

variations, but despite these it or they can be identified as a single composition or the work of a single composer because of singular unifying styles. Holland writes:

Mozart sounds like Mozart, Hemingway reads like Hemingway, Matisse looks like Matisse. Always. And we can identify them after a few bars or sentences or a mere glance at a picture. Aestheticians speak of their “style”, while psychologists might point to personality. [...] this persistence of style by a concept of identity first put forward by psychoanalyst Heinz Lichtenstein.

[...] Lichtenstein was writing about *identity as seen from outside*

[...] Lichtenstein defined this identity as “invariance within change or invariance within a transformation”. He used a metaphor from music. One can read identity (or style) in another person just as one hears themes and variations in a symphony. The music is constantly changing, constantly moving toward a new and unexpected sound, yet one can trace persistent and recurring themes. We humans can vary our themes infinitely. We can play variations that are positive and negative, healthy and unhealthy, creative and ritualistic, liberal and conservative, hostile and loving – all the variations of human life. But, if Lichtenstein is right, an observer, a biographer, say, should be able to trace a sameness, a personal style, if you will, within all those changes (Holland 2006b)

In this essay Holland picks up on Lichtenstein’s proposal, that knowledge of unique identity may assist appropriate decision making and help the construction of a successful social identity. This idea implies that anyone can be happy as long as important decisions are made in light of one’s unique identity theme. These ideas encouraged volunteers to follow free associative film criticism in forms adapted from Holland’s proposals presented in *Meeting Movies*.⁸ Holland and Schwartz’s *Know Thyself: The Delphi Seminars* (2008) was also very relevant for the development of my conceptual framework and practical working methods. In this publication, Holland and Schwartz expanded on their original essay “The Delphi Seminar” (1975), where they presented the free associative literary analysis teaching method in a contemporary context. I would go on to develop my initial free associative film analysis method combining ideas presented in *Meeting Movies* and *Know Thyself*.

However, I felt I also needed to return to Lichtenstein’s original writings. To see if or how I would apply notions of unique identity theme in my research, especially because I did not want to build identity profiles as Holland had done. Lichtenstein first presented his unique identity theme in a paper “Identity and Sexuality – A Study of their

⁸ Indeed, the idea that different ways of interacting with the world are due to biology and early care, and not personal inadequacy proved to bring relief and release to many volunteers during the course of my trials. As my research progressed, I found that this helped volunteers to pursue free associative strings that were not always easy but that always produced rewarding results. Volunteers’ writing that support this idea will be presented in chapters two and four.

Interrelationship in Man (1961). Later, with the assistance of Holland and Schwartz, this and his other papers on identity were compiled and published in the volume *The Dilemma of Identity* (1977).

Lichtenstein writes that he developed his conception of unique identity theme arose from his desire to “the proposition that identification is a concept designed to make understandable how the ‘inside subject’ gradually becomes capable of relating to what is ‘outside’.” (Lichtenstein 1977: 71) He began his exposé of the theory referring to his observations on subject-object juxtaposition presented in animal studies, and the manner in which humans attribute an *Umwelt*⁹, or a harmonized way of being in the world, to animals. In general as human beings we attribute a standardized manner of interacting with environment and prey to species and individual animals, both quarry and predators alike.

Thus, Lichtenstein looked at the subject of identity, as a vehicle of joining the isolated animal and its external environment. Expanding this argument to explain how the subject-object dilemma is overcome in humans, he proposes:

The task of describing the processes of individuation without recourse to the concept of identification is the next step in any attempt to overcome the subject-object dilemma, and, by doing this, to gain a more complete access to the problems of human identity than has been possible up to now. As an effort in this direction I suggest the use of the well-known concept of "imprinting" for the description of certain aspects of early infant-mother interaction. Imprinting, in the definition of Lorenz "is the name we have given the process by which the releaser of an innate reaction to a fellow member of the species is acquired." It is characterized by three observable facts. It is influenced by conspecific living material, it is restricted to critical phases of ontogenesis, and it is irreversible. [...] The imprinting stimulus combination would be the individual and unique unconscious wishes, the unconscious needs of the mother with regard to her child

[...] The maintenance of the identity theme is claimed to have priority over all other needs—those emanating from drives as well as those representing powerful ego interests. The identity theme appears thus as an independent variable the vicissitudes of which can be traced in the symptomatology of the patient. The proposition of a theme of identity as an

⁹ Lichtenstein interpreted *Umwelt* as: “The animal's innate ‘schema’ refers to the innate object representation of a drive; we have in this schema the guarantee for each animal's identity—not a *sense* of identity, or any form of awareness, but a guarantee of ‘living sameness’ within change, of continuity as an individual of a particular species. The animal's *Umwelt* is defined not as an ‘external environment,’ but it rather represents a range of experience within which certain identities become recognizable, such as the identity of the animal's prey, its equals, its foes. Thus the animal's *Umwelt* delineates its identity. We therefore must find a concept permitting a delineation of identity which is appropriate to the human condition. (Lichtenstein 1977: 71-72)

independent variable influences directly the role which we attribute to the drives in a given life situation. (Lichtenstein 1977: 74-75)

Thus Lichtenstein asserts that every individual has a central identity “theme” or “natural way of interacting with the world”. This is developed during early care and is dependent on the manner in which contact with the mother “educates” the infant to expect to have its needs met. Though it may present variations, it remains constant throughout life. Thus infants develop a way of interacting with their principle care givers before the self-object differentiation phase is established. In later life this will be translated into a way of interacting with the world in general.

Lichtenstein developed this theory as a consequence of his therapeutic practise and with a desire to help patients deal with psychopathologies. He illustrated his theoretical representation, referring to the case of one of his patients Anna S. When Anna S arrived in his office seeking help she was twenty-three year old, and suffered from severe and deep-seated psychopathologies that had led her to a life of emotional abuse, culminating in prostitution:

A twenty-three-year-old girl entered treatment in order to extricate herself from a life situation that was rapidly destroying her spiritually as well as physically. The main issues were: prostitution, conflicts arising from homosexual relations, periodic drinking, suicidal impulses. More exactly, she came for help because she could no longer endure the anxieties, depressions, and the overwhelming sense of despair and loneliness that had, in her opinion, gradually driven her to the type of life that she had been leading approximately since her sixteenth year. There were many more manifestations of serious pathology than those mentioned: there were phobic anxieties, like fears of rats and cats; compulsive spending of money, often on quite useless things, which kept her in a state of chronic indebtedness; alternating periods of compulsive eating, and inability to eat; periods of incapacity to do any kind of work, not only sustained work on a job, but cleaning up her room, etc., which were followed by a kind of frenzied over activity, where she would, for instance, clean house for several consecutive days, continuing even at night. There were, in short, few facts of her life that could be described as normal. (90)

Lichtenstein built an identity profile for Anna S using her free associative analysis: The purpose of this activity was to help her understand previous psychotic behaviour. Also, to build in her an understanding that she had a certain way of interacting with the world that had been acquired during early care. He also aspired to encourage her to develop more appropriate habit patterns, which took into consideration that fact that “naturally” she had certain destructive tendencies:

The interpretation of prostitution as a pathological form of maintenance of an identity theme appears to be supported by the psychological development that took place in Anna while under treatment. The therapeutic problem in Anna's case can be defined in terms of

the range of variations of her identity theme. Was she capable of a less pathological form of implementation of this theme—an implementation that would not compel her to become fused with the other person as an alienated ‘organ-‘ or ‘thing-form’ of herself? (95)

This method seemed to work for Anna S. because after her sessions with Lichtenstein, she was able to build a new and more appropriate life style around her identity theme profile leaving her abusive lesbian partner and destructive existence behind. In fact, her situation changed to such an extent that she met, fell in love with, and formed a stable and more balanced relationship with a male partner, Ray. Her life with Ray seemed to be satisfactory, and she wrote to Lichtenstein of it in the following terms: “Never before have I felt peace of mind with anyone, warmth and feeling of wanting to do.” (98). Her letter indicated that Ray’s happiness seemed to be the central focus of her life, and so although she was maintaining her identity theme, her tendency of see herself as an extension of another, in this case Ray, she seemed to have found a more balanced way of living with this. While we do not know the end of her story, Anna S did seem to encounter a less pathological form of implementing her identity theme. Lichtenstein expressed concern as to whether Anna S would be able to survive a rupture in this relationship, without therapeutic assistance. Thus, while the solution might not be perfect; knowing about her identity theme did appear to help Anna S construct a better future and freed from the pathologies she had been suffering from when she entered Lichtenstein’s office.

Lichtenstein consideration of how unique identity theme can be seen in terms of social identity is very interesting. Anna S’s case was very extreme. The feelings of neglect, rejection and confused expressions of love she experience during her childhood seemed to have given her a particularly difficult start in life. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles knowledge of her unique identity theme, allowed Anna S to change a life that had been set on a very destructive path. Anna S.’s case also demonstrated that a unique identity theme with apparently very negative tendencies did not necessarily have to end in a destructive lifestyle. These ideas propose that when and if people understand their identity theme, they will feel more comfortable making decisions and variations of it may be visible in decisions made:

The mother imprints upon the infant not *an* identity, but an "*identity theme*". This *theme* is irreversible, but it is capable of variations, variations that spell the difference between human creativity and "a destiny neurosis." What in the adult is referred to as his social identity (Erikson's ego identity)—being a worker, a farmer, a hunter, etc.—is, at its best, a successful variation of the identity theme imprinted upon the infant. At its worst, it is an

artificially imposed part, the playing of which is experienced as alienation by the individual, because it is incompatible with his identity theme. (113)

From the position Lichtenstein presents in this paper it is important to take one's unique identity theme into consideration, when making ego decisions, like career or lifestyle choices. If this is done the individual can be happy. However, if the unique identity theme is not known, acknowledged, or worse still ignored, there may be incompatibility between lifestyle choices and the individual's core identity. This in turn may lead to crisis.

Another relevant idea arising from Lichtenstein's conceptualization of unique identity theme is that the individual is not responsible for its construction. Therefore, there is no point wondering if one has a good or bad identity theme, one just has to learn how to deal with this, and adopt strategies that will allow the individual to deal successfully with the world. After all, Anna S indicated that even an apparently detrimental identity theme does not have to lead to frustration. I considered that these two ideas could be important for my free associative film analysis project, but I did not know how they would be employed at these initial stages. Having examined Lichtenstein's work, I was left to question, if free associative film criticism could help people live better.

The potential of fictional narratives to influence behaviour has been discussed at least since Plato suggested in *The Republic* (1994) that poets should be banned because of the subversive influence their poetry could play on the moral values and instincts of citizens. However, as Alexander Nehemas pointed out in the article "Plato's Pop Culture Problem and Ours" (2010), Plato expressed concern that merely exposing the general populace to stories that glorified immoral values and practises would have a corruptive effect on society. This implies that simple contact with fictional worlds can produce change in a manner similar to that proposed by evolutionary psychologists, specifically Literary Darwinists, today. I do not really want to follow this line of investigation in my work as I want to understand how deep contemplation of fictional narratives can influence lives, not just mere exposure. I want to look at how reflective contact with fictional narratives can offer change. Holland had proposed in *Literature and the Brain*: "Literature, therefore helps us live better [...] loosen boundaries: between self and non-self; inner and outer; past, present, and future" (Holland 2009: 330)". When he writes about this potential capacity of literature to all us to live better, it is possible to suggest

that he is writing about free associative film analysis. I wanted to investigate how this and other method of analysis that required reflection on connections between text and viewer can offer vehicles of change and improvement.

However, as many of Holland's boldest proposals were based on scientific research, I decided to look at some of the studies he referred to and related work to help me form a conceptual framework of possibility for my practical investigation. This would prove to be very important because it enlarged my expectations for the continuing work.

1.3 Scientific and literary theories

Because the somatic marker hypothesis is central to both Holland's proposals on how the body actually interacts with literature, and to Damasio's body-minded brain and homeostasis theories which Holland uses, I would like to offer a more ample explanation of Damasio's thinking on the subject. Therefore, I will refer to his presentation of the theory to the scientific community in "The somatic marker hypothesis and the possible functions of the prefrontal cortex" (1996):

[...] the somatic marker hypothesis, which I believe is relevant to the understanding of processes of human reasoning and decision making. The ventromedial sector of the prefrontal cortices is critical to the operations postulated here, but the hypothesis does not necessarily apply to prefrontal cortex as a whole and should not be seen as an attempt to unify frontal lobe functions under a single mechanism. The key idea in the hypothesis is that 'marker' signals influence the processes of response to stimuli, at multiple levels of operation, some of which occur overtly (consciously, 'in mind') and some of which occur covertly (non-consciously, in a non-minded manner). The marker signals arise in bioregulatory processes, including those which express themselves in emotions and feelings, but are not necessarily confined to those alone. This is the reason why the markers are termed somatic: they relate to body-state structure and regulation even when they do not arise in the body proper but rather in the brain's representation of the body. Examples of the covert action of 'marker' signals are the undeliberated inhibition of a response learned previously; the introduction of a bias in the selection of an aversive or appetitive mode of behaviour, or in the otherwise deliberate evaluation of varied option-outcome scenarios. Examples of overt action include the conscious 'qualifying' of certain option-outcome scenarios as dangerous or advantageous. The hypothesis rejects attempts to limit human reasoning and decision making to mechanisms relying, in an exclusive and unrelated manner, on either conditioning alone or cognition alone. (Damasio 1996: 1413)

Thus, Damasio clearly proposes that human reasoning and decision making processes are not centred exclusively in brain locations or bodily locations, but are spread throughout the body and brain in distributed and interconnected systems. In this model, the first line of reaction before reflective consideration to external object is produced by bodily reactions housed in somatic markers. These, according to Damasio's definition above, may be seen as dynamically and actively stored bodily memories interlinking the physical body and emotional brain through the brain's representation of the body and these same bodily memories. These memories stored throughout the body-mind warn individuals of potentially dangerous situations because of past or learned experiences.

In *Descartes' Error* Damasio also proposes that positive as well as negative somatic markers exist. Positive somatic markers prime the body to favour activities that

will lead to homeostasis. A positive somatic marker Damasio writes “becomes a beacon of incentive” (Damasio 2006: 174). Damasio’s proposals made me wonder if activities like reading books and watching movies, that distract the mind from worrying about potential and/or future problems, could produce positive somatic markers. They also support Holland’s idea that the first level of interaction between fictional narratives and publics is relaxation and the expectation of pleasure that will not action from readers and viewers.

Damasio also wrote about how he considered somatic markers could be laid down to achieve homeostatic (a position where the organism exists in a functionally balanced biological state), at both individual and social levels. Memories, he writes, that threaten the body’s physical integrity are not genetically determined, but learned from past experience where individuals gained stable homeostatic states within a specific social context. As survival implies the reduction of unpleasant bodily states, people may not even be aware of these individually and collectively generated reactions. In balanced societies, one hopes somatic markers assist the development of appropriate habit patterns which will also be socially acceptable and protective of the good of all. Though these reactions may even at times be processed at a conscious level, they are not analyzed intellectually. (*cf.* Damasio 2006: 179) However, Damasio alerts to the fact that there have been many historic examples showing that cultural education can predominate over the machinery of reasoning, and he proposes that somatic markers swayed by educational, cultural and generational forces can contribute to this:

Yet there are counter examples. In Germany and the Soviet Union during the 1930s and 1940s, in China during the Cultural Revolution, and in Cambodia during the Pol Pot regime, to mention only the most obvious such cases, a sick culture prevailed upon a presumably normal machinery of reason, with disastrous consequences. I fear that sizable sectors of Western society are gradually becoming other tragic counter-examples. (178-9)

Thus ailing cultural regimes can prevail over presumably normal reasoning systems by generating altered conditions for the expression of positive somatic markers and homeostasis. Overcoming, culturally attributed somatic markers requires reflective thought. I wondered if teaching people to interactive deeply with narrative fiction could build patterns that could attribute the capacity to more reflective thought in general.

Stanford neuroendocrinologist Robert Sapolsky’s research into the root causes of stress in modern society published in *Why Zebras’s Don’t Get Ulcers* (2004) also indicate advantages to teaching people to look beyond their immediate circumstances, something

that reflective engagement with fictional narratives normally encourages. Through his experiments, Sapolsky demonstrates that biologically human bodies and brains cannot distinguish between potentially or hypothetically dangerous situations, and those that represent real threats. Thus, he proposes that many of today's stress related illnesses are caused by people's inability to abstract themselves from hypothetical or future problems. In a simplified version of his theory, he proposes that relentless fretting about future or hypothetical issues like paying bills, possible health problems or the prospective effects of external events like the current financial crisis, evokes fight and flight reactions. These responses were designed to deal with real and present dangers like seeing a rabid dog or mugger, and should only be activated for short periods, as they invoke anaerobic respiration at a cellular level. They furnish the energy necessary for fast and efficient physical reaction, but there are disadvantages. This form of respiration produces a side product: lactic acid. The body functions well when this is eliminated after the threat has passed. However, if it is subjected to continuous stress stimulation this purging becomes difficult, and non-optimal conditions occur at a cellular level, making the body more susceptible to illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease and cardiovascular accidents in the long term.

Sapolsky does not use these arguments to dismiss the severity of the diseases. Patients must be offered medical solutions. However, he claims in terms of public health policies, medical treatment is not enough because as this simply takes care of the illness, without addressing generalized causal factors. Sapolsky's proposals offer plausible explanations for why apparently futile activities like watching football games and soap operas are so popular today. Combining Sapolsky's proposals to homeostasis and somatic marker theories, it can be suggested that, positive somatic markers may lead bodies to pursue activities that lead to homeostasis at a cellular levels and to avoid those that have contrary effects. Bodies may have learned that watching TV shows or football matches bring relaxation and temporary relief from stress at a cellular level. While watching trivia, bodies can enter a period of rest as fight or flight instincts are not activated. Therefore, though trivia may not offer alternative models, it is not destructive for the body in the short term at least, because it offers homeostasis¹⁰.

¹⁰ These ideas led me to wonder if in my practical research, I could investigate a more constructive release from stress so that the effects would also be felt after the viewing period.

However, Sapolsky points out that stress reactions are not merely produced by the activation of fight and flight mechanisms, but can also be provoked by social structures. He cites his experiments with primates to demonstrate that inherently hierarchical societies, such as human and primate communities, generate stress. Sapolsky and his team discovered that primates on the lower rungs of the hierarchical ladder have poorer bodily function and get sick more often than those higher up. They also appear to suffer from more stress. Sapolsky concluded that this occurs because dominant members of hierarchical societies reduce their “stress-load” by transferring this to members placed lower in the hierarchical structure.

Sapolsky also writes of experiments that demonstrate that experiencing foetal stress lays down physical metabolic processing systems that can lead to illness in later life. Animal studies have shown that stressing a rat during pregnancy, through food deprivation, causes lifelong psychological changes in the offspring. Rats that experienced stress during gestation were more anxious than normal rats and exhibited metabolic syndrome, leading to obesity, insulin-resistant diabetes and cardiovascular disease. They also exhibited elevated glucocorticoid production, also associated with these diseases in humans. These experiments indicate that stress experienced early in life or during gestations lays down physical markers in the body. The body appears to store the memory and the habit patterns associated with these effects, even when the stressing elements are removed. (*cf.* 94-100)

Fetal Origins of Adult Disease (FOAD) studies offer examples of similar conditions in humans and illustrate that disease patterns can be transmitted through generations, indicating the complex nature of mental and emotional health. FOAD studies demonstrate that healthy adults who grow up under normal environments still exhibit tendencies to specific disease patterns if they suffered nutrient deprivation during a specific stage of fetal development. One of the largest studies in this area was carried out with children born after the Dutch Winter of Hunger at the end of World War II. The three-month Nazi blockade meant that pregnant mothers’ nutritional intake was severely curtailed for three months; but normalized when this was lifted. Babies gestated during this period developed specific disease patterns as adults, dependant on the gestation phase their mother’s suffered undernourishment.

First-trimester malnutrition appeared to program for heart disease, obesity and cholesterol problems. Second and third-semester deprivations produced a tendency for diabetes. Incredibly, as if the pregnant mother returned to her fetal glitch, the same

biological tendencies reappeared in second generation babies. Grandchildren of the Dutch Winter of Hungry were also born with the same tendencies as their mothers, independent of the mother's health at the time of birth. Thus Sapolsky proposes: "FOAD tendencies can be transmitted across generations, without the benefits of genes. It's not due to shared genes, but to shared environment, namely, the intimately shared blood supply during gestation" (Sapolsky 2004:99).

Thus, it appears that our state of health is deeply influenced by social and generational issues, as well as by genetic and emotional factors. Sapolsky finds further support for these arguments in studies and social science reviews that have followed the health of adults who were either cared for in neglectful orphanage environments or abused as children. These provide strong evidence to support the idea that early care and emotional succor influence children's growth and development. Sapolsky concludes:

Though the subject is still poorly studied, childhood stress may produce the building blocks for the sort of adult diseases we've been considering. For example, when you examine children who had been adopted more than a year before from Romanian orphanages, the longer the child spent in the orphanage, the higher the resting glucocorticoid levels. Similarly, children who have been abused have elevated glucocorticoid levels and decreased size and activity in the most evolved part of the brain, the frontal cortex (101).

Sapolsky also proposes that social environments and conditions like poverty and sensations of injustice may influence physical and emotional health. Referring to the Rudolph Virchow's, famous proposals that "Medicine is a social science and politics nothing but medicine on a large scale" and "Physicians are the natural attorneys of the poor."¹¹ (Sapolsky 2004: 354), Sapolsky suggests that health is determined just as much by political organization as access to health services. In an interview with Eduardo Punset recorded in *The Happiness Trip: A Scientific Journey* (2007), Sapolsky proposes that the roots of present day illness patterns might well have began when the first food surpluses were distributed in primitive agrarian society, if the options selected for the storage and distribution of these led to the perception or reality of unfair distribution, and sensations of inequality and privilege. Sapolsky claims that these same feelings are at the root of much modern illness. He further suggests that it is not lack of access to health care systems as such, or even poverty itself that lays the foundation stones of stress related illnesses but "poverty in the midst of wealth. Injustice, the unfair distribution of wealth, is the greatest indicator that people will have bad health." (Punset 2007: 99) Thus, he

¹¹ Rudolph Virchow was a 19th century German physician, regarded by many as the father of public health studies.

proposes, public health will not improve by applying reductionist models. Developing vaccines and antibiotics to deal with illness or attributing financial subsidies and medical aid to the poor will not resolve public health issues, unless the basic psychological states that underlie the feeling of powerlessness and helplessness across different sectors of society are also tackled.

Poverty is not just a temporary physical situation that is quickly altered with a little money, but a dominant state of mind. Sapolsky writes “the scar of poverty remains in place a long time after the deepest pockets of poverty have been overcome. (Punset 2007: 102) Because of its scope and span, Sapolsky describes poverty, or the perception of poverty as the greatest social illness today. Referring to a study carried out in the 1990s, “The Secret Wounds of Poverty”, Sapolsky concludes:

Two generations after families have put poverty behind them, attitudes, anxieties and insecurities exist that arise around a feeling of unprotectedness. It’s striking that, psychologically, when poverty stress or trauma exist in the early years of life, they leave indelible marks. (102)

It has been proven medically, that stress and depression tend to “go together”. People exposed to a lot of stressing factors, especially when these are internally generated, are usually more susceptible to depression (*cf.* Punset: 92-103). The mind and body retain indelible marks that can lead to disease patterns in later life and even if great wealth is obtained, metabolic imprinting laid down when hunger and vulnerability were experienced will regulate the organism as FOAD studies have indicated (*cf.* Sapolsky 2004: 291-5).

Therefore considering Sapolsky’s proposals, in light of Damasio’s somatic marker and homeostasis theories, I wondered if reflective contact with films viewers connect positively with could offer not only new ways of thinking but also the capacity for people to see beyond their immediate circumstances and build new habit patterns. I considered the relevance of looking at means of using contact with movies to encourage first, relaxation and a release from stress at a cellular level. Then second, to try to develop method of connecting with movies that could encourage the development of reflective thought habits and introduce new ideas and concepts to viewers’ lives.

These ideas also made me question if people can distinguish between feelings and emotions experienced because of involvement with real world events and those provoked by contact with fictional narratives. Antonio Damasio presented in *Looking for Spinoza* (2003) indicated the contrary. As with many experiments, this one began accidentally. In a

routine procedure, a Parkinson's disease patient was undergoing electrical pulse treatment to stimulate the brain centres responsible for dopamine production to counteract the symptoms of the disease. In this particular case, one of the electrodes was accidentally placed 2 millimetres below the desired site and unintentionally stimulated a brain area associated with sadness. As a result of this stimulus, the patient stopped the normal ongoing conversation abruptly and her expression changed, she cast her eyes down and her expression became one of extreme sadness. After a few seconds she began to cry. This quickly became a heartfelt sobbing and her entire demeanour was of total misery. Then she began to talk about how sad she felt, using some of the expressions below:

I'm falling down in my head, I no longer want to live, to see anything, hear anything, feel anything ...

I'm fed up with life, I've had enough ... I don't want to live any more, I'm disgusted with life ...

Everything is useless ... I feel worthless.

I'm scared in this world.

I want to hide in a corner ... I'm crying over myself, of course ... I'm hopeless, why am I bothering you? (2003: 68)

Faced with these manifestations, the doctors halted the procedure rapidly. Ninety seconds after the electrical current was interrupted the patient's emotional state returned to normal. She could not understand or explain what had happened to her, just that one moment she felt fine and the next she felt practically suicidal. Once the incident had passed, no resulting consequences were observed. Because of the nature of the reactions, after she had recovered from the event, the medical team asked the patient if she would not mind repeated it and she authorized this. Even though the patient was consciously aware that the second event was artificially produced, events followed the same pattern. She experienced the same emotions and feelings and guaranteed that these were just as intense despite the fact that she knew they had been artificially provoked (cf. Damasio 2004: 65-74). She could not distinguish between the emotions artificially provoked and those resulting from real world events.

Despite these outcomes Damasio still proposes that feelings reveal "the state of life within an entire organism" (2003: 6) offering "expressions of our struggles for balance" (7). They are the body's way of making sense of events. However, feelings produced "artificially" appear to have the same intensity as those brought about by real world events. Considering these scientific results and theory, it becomes increasingly

more difficult to understand if the brain/mind really knows when it is reacting to real life events or simulations. It can no longer be seen as a superior organ recognized as having the ability to decipher truths coldly and analytically, but rather after processing automatic and involuntary responses, it appears to become a neural network whose principal function is to decipher sophisticated signals stored throughout the body.

This reflection led me to think about the “truth” of the stories we hold about ourselves and our values and if there is any way to know how these stories actually form our self image. Aaron Beck’s cognitive therapy theories and practises presented in *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* (1979) are very relevant to this idea. Beck’s work demonstrated very clearly that our image of self is truly based on the stories we narrate and maintain about ourselves, irrespective of whether these are true or not. He also demonstrated that deep seated emotional states, like depression can be changed, when these narratives of self are altered in an appropriate and sustained fashion. Beck proposes that people interact with the world through a personally constructed interpretative framework, which he calls a cognitive triad¹². The cognitive triad developed from cognitions¹³ and schemas¹⁴, and is relatively stable while thinking patterns are retained. However, Beck holds that the cognitive triad can be altered by introducing and repeating new thinking patterns. This indicates that people’s perception of self and the world they live in can be changed.

In cognitive therapy, clinical depression is treated by reformulation of the cognitive triad through a talking therapy that allows individuals to change their self image by confronting defective cognitions with ones that are accurate to their lives. Flawed

¹² The following definitions are all taken from Aaron Beck’s *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* (1979). It should be noted that in the case of the cognitive triad, the definition is given for the triad of a depressed patient. Thus its use of negative parameters: “The cognitive triad consists of three major cognitive patterns that induce the patient to regard himself, his future, and his experiences in an idiosyncratic manner. The first component of the triad revolves around the patient’s negative view of himself. He sees himself as defective, inadequate, diseased or deprived. [...] The second component of the cognitive triad consists of the depressed person’s tendency to interpret his ongoing experiences in a negative way. [...] The third [...] a negative view of the future.” (Beck 1979: 11)

¹³ “cognitions (verbal or pictorial “events” in his stream of consciousness) are based on attitudes or assumptions (schemas), developed from previous experiences. For example, if a person interprets all his experiences in terms of whether he is competent or adequate, his thinking may be dominated by the schema, “Unless I do everything perfectly, I’m a failure”. Consequently, he reacts to situations in terms of adequacy even when they are unrelated to whether or not he is personally competent.[...] The therapeutic techniques are designed to identify, reality-test, and correct distorted conceptualizations and the dysfunctional beliefs (schemas) underlying these cognitions ” (3-4)

¹⁴ Relatively stable cognitive patterns form the basis for the regularity of interpretations of a particular set of situations. (12)

automatic thoughts, cognitions, are replaced with alternative, realistic and powerful thought constructs derived from positive evidence from patients' own lives. The purpose is to counteract the negative cognitions that have led to the depression in the first place. When the process of thought replacement is followed consistently, depressive cycles can be broken. However, treatment requires a concerted effort on the part of patients to replace old thinking patterns with new ones. This in turn permits the reconstruction of a more appropriate cognitive triad and a return to mental health.

Beck also suggests that as treatment progresses, the process should be fine-tuned and seek to provide the patient with tools to avoid problems in the future. As the patient's symptoms lessen, the focus of therapy shifts to changing his faulty assumptions because these have a direct effect upon the patient's ability to avoid future depressions (cf. Beck 1979: 244). These suggestions made me wonder how retention of positive ideas derived from personal interactions with movies through repetition could assist the production of positive schemas appropriate for viewers' lives. It also emphasised the necessity of concerted repetition of new ideas to substitute older ones, implying that simply watching a movie or reading a book is not enough to influence minds and lives, indicating also that transformational contact with literature must imply deep reading and discussion.

In *Descartes Error* Damasio also refers to this topic from a different perspective when he writes about the physical prerequisites necessary for thought. Thinking, he writes requires the construction of the "neural underpinnings of reason" (Damasio 2006; xxi – xxix) – the physical neural paths that allow specific thoughts to be processed. Assuming contemporary thinking in these areas, he proposes these physical constructions are constantly deconstructed and re-assembled dynamically, dependent on the conditions encountered in the body-minded brain. "New" thoughts cannot occur if the organism has not produced the physical neural highways that permit them to "run". Reading Damasio's theories on the physical conditions necessary for thinking patterns to be processed, was the first time I thought about the dynamic physical mechanisms that have to be in place to permit thinking and reasoning processes to occur. Damasio's proposals made me valorise even more the potential benefits of contact with fictional worlds. After all, within this hypothesis, it is possible to consider that reading books and watching movies might offer the brain/body building blocks to physically construct new neural highways that could permit viewers' or readers' to physically process thoughts about circumstances outside their actual living experience.

Another scientific concept that expanded my expectations for the potential benefits of deep contact with fictional narratives was Damasio's models for proto-self, core-self and core consciousness presented in *The Feeling of What Happens; Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (2000). Damasio proposed that self and consciousness are constructed from the biological basis of the proto self¹⁵ through the addition of nonverbal narratives which produce prevailing wordless narratives that register the interaction between the self and external objects.

Curiously and very relevant for this work, Damasio questions if contemporary society is not addicted to visual images transmitted on screens because these act like an external imitation of the primordial, nonverbal, pictorial narratives of consciousness, "Movies are the closest external representation of the prevailing storytelling that goes on in our minds" (186). In Damasio's theory these wordless narratives record interactions at a proto-self/external object phase and transmit these interactions into a precursor of language so that the interchange can be registered in core consciousness, and in this way reach the level of awareness. Thus the interaction between self and external object precedes awareness and is processed at a nonverbal level.

Damasio does not distinguish between factual and fictional external objects at the construction of core stage, and one is left to consider that they are processed in the same manner, because the individual is not aware of the interaction at a conscious level at this stage as words and language (elements necessary to transport transactions into consciousness and autobiographical self) are not employed at this level. The transit into consciousness occurs very quickly after the wordless narrative is produced and the continued combination of self and external objects produce core selves.¹⁶ The records of these events are registered in the second order mapping of core consciousness¹⁷ filtering into the mind, thus creating a growing awareness:

¹⁵ "Proto-self: The proto-self is an interconnected and temporarily coherent collection of the neural patterns which represent the state of the organism, moment by moment, at multiple levels of the brain. We are *not* conscious of the proto-self (Damasio 2000: 174).

¹⁶ "Core self: The core self inheres in the second order non-verbal account that occurs whenever an object modifies the proto-self. The core self can be triggered by any object. The mechanism of production of the core self undergoes minimal changes across a lifetime. We are conscious of the core self. (174)

¹⁷ " I [Damasio] see core consciousness as created "in pulses, each pulse triggered by each object that we interact with or that we recall. Let's say that a consciousness pulse begins at the instant just before a new object triggers the process of changing the proto-self and terminates when a new object begins triggering its own set of changes. The proto-self modified by the first object then becomes the *inaugural* proto-self for the new object. A new pulse of core consciousness begins.

The narrative of the state of the proto-self being changed by the interaction with an object must first occur in its nonlanguage form if it is ever to be translated into suitable words. In the sentence 'I *see* a car coming', the word *see* stands for a particular act of perceptual processing penetrated by my organism and involving my self. And the word *see* is there, properly moored to the word *I*, to translate the wordless play unfolding in my mind (186).

[...] I [Damasio] believe the imaged, nonverbal narrative of core consciousness is swift, that its unexamined details have eluded us for a long time, that the narrative is barely explicit, so have hinted that its expression is almost like the emanation of a belief. But some aspects of the narrative filter into our minds to create the beginning of the knowing mind and the self. (187)

Damasio proposes that animals possess core consciousness because they also register the proto-self/external object interactions. However, as animals cannot transfer and express these transactions into language, they do not generate a "verbal memory" of these, recorded in an autobiographical self. Autobiographical self is a purely human feature and can be seen as the vehicle through which individuals acquire and maintain knowledge from past events and gain an expectation and anticipation of the future. It transfers the nonverbal neural storytelling of proto-self and external object into language and memory.

Damasio writes that this nonverbal storytelling is the reason why the history and development of human civilization is so closely bound to narratives and story-telling traditions because these nonverbal narratives were the first mechanism that allows the organism to read its interactions with external objects. As this enters consciousness it leads to awareness and the need for language to be able to "explain" these events (*cf.* Damasio 2000: 133-194). This language is a storied narrative version of initial contact:

Telling stories in the sense of registering what happens in the form of brain maps, is probably a brain obsession and probably begins relatively early both in terms of evolution and in terms of the complexity of the neural structures required to create narratives. Telling stories precedes language, since it is, in fact, a condition of language.

The continuity of consciousness is based on the steady generation of consciousness pulses which correspond to the endless processing of myriad objects, whose interaction, actual or recalled constantly, modifies the proto-self. The continuity of consciousness comes from the abundant flow of nonverbal narratives of core consciousness.

It is probable that more than one narrative is created simultaneously. This is because more than one object can be engaged at about the same time, although not many can be engaged simultaneously, and more than one object can thus induce a modification in the state of the proto-self. When we talk about a "stream of consciousness", a metaphor that suggests a single track and a single sequence of thoughts, the part of the stream that carries consciousness is likely to arise not in just one object but in several. Moreover, it is also possible that each object interaction generates more than one narrative, since several brain levels can be involved. Again, such a situation seems beneficial because it would produce an overabundance of core consciousness and ensure the continuity of the state of "knowing". (176-177)

[...] Philosophers often puzzle about the problem of so called ‘intentionality’ the intriguing fact that mental contents are ‘about’ things outside the mind. I believe that the mind’s pervasive ‘aboutness’ is rooted in the brain’s storytelling attitude. [...] the brain naturally weaves wordless stories about what happens to an organism immersed in an environment (189).

Damasio’s proposals place the role of the external fictional world in a very powerful position to influence the construction of core consciousness. It speaks to how the body and mind are influenced by the exertions of external objects, whether factual or fictional at even the very basic level of development of core consciousness.

Sapolsky’s theories, somatic markers, homeostasis all speak to how the mind may be influenced by the stories it processes and that the body guards the reminders of past events perhaps more faithfully than the mind itself. Thus, to avoid stress, we may watch futile fiction and to avoid discomfort we may avoid or misread certain literary encounters. However, Holland proposes that reflecting on these encounters may lead beyond these initial “physical” reactions. This may lead to increased awareness and acceptance of self, new thinking patterns and coping skills. These scientific theories demonstrate that there is much to learn about the whole field of literary encounter and that this experience may have benefits that evens its greatest supporters had not anticipated. However, to unravelling the mysteries of this encounter, the body and the brain must be seen at the same level and the creation and appreciation of literature and film cannot be seen as nebulous, abstract entities but activities that are grounded in a body-minded brain.

The literary community has been hesitant in thinking along these lines and perhaps this reluctance is not surprising when one considers that Cartesian dualism formed the basis, not only of general contemporary thinking, but also the interpretative framework through which scientific investigation was viewed for more four centuries. In an overview of scientific experiments dating back to the 1960s, Norman Doidge demonstrates in *The Brain that Changes Itself* (2007), that the idea of a body-minded brain was only truly embraced by the scientific community in the 1990s, despite the work of many leading scientists including Paul Bach-y-Rita, Michael Merzenich. Vilayanur Ramachandran and many others, whose work proved the contrary. Merzenich’s brain mapping experiments carried out in the 1970s and 80s, and cochlear implant offered undisputable evidence of the manner in which bodily activity can retrain and reprogram the brain. However, it still took the scientific community over five decades to overthrow the thinking arising from Cartesian dualism. Perhaps, therefore it is no wonder that

artistic production and appreciation are not seen as intimately linked to physical bodily structures and that thinking and feelings are commonly placed above the body.

Antonio Damasio terminated the initial 1994 publication of *Descartes' Error* wondering about possible mechanisms, including pharmaceutical option that might contribute to basic homeostasis in patients dealing with different psychopathologies. In the Preface for the 2006 reprint of *Descartes' Error*, where he contextualizes that work within the context of ongoing research into emotions, he reestablishes somatic markers as conscious gut reactions that placed emotion in the loop of reason assisting the reasoning process rather than necessarily disturb it. However, considering that homeostasis is the basal object for all biological mechanisms, he writes about the importance of contact with the arts and humanities in the physical construction of a more expanded social consciousness. He went on to suggest creating a “two-bridge” between neuroscience and the humanities to help explain, among other things, how biological homeostasis is influenced by interaction with cultural objects:

The postscriptum of *Descartes' Error* contained an idea which pointed to the future of neurobiological research: the mechanisms of basic homeostasis constitute a blueprint for the cultural development of the human values which permit us to judge actions as good or evil, and classify objects as beautiful or ugly. At the time, writing about this idea gave me hope that a two-way bridge could be established between neurobiology and the humanities, thus providing the way for a better understanding of human conflict and for a more comprehensive account of creativity. I am pleased to report that some progress has been made to building that sort of bridge. For example, some of us are actively investigating the brain states associated with moral reasoning while others are trying to discover what the brain does during esthetic experiences. The intent is not to reduce ethics or esthetics to brain circuitry but rather to explore the threads that interconnect neurobiology to culture. I am even more hopeful today that such a seemingly utopian bridge can become reality and optimistic that we will enjoy its benefits without having to wait another century. (Damasio 2006: xx)

Damasio's appeal to construct a two-way bridge that does not minimize either field is very appropriate to my work. I hoped that my work might assist the development of this two-way bridge. Thus, I aspired to hold the scientific considerations explored about in mind when developing my own working methods and reviewing literary programs showing evidence of how contact with books and films influenced readers' and viewers' minds and lives.

1.4 An overview of relevant literary and film programs

In the literature programs I reviewed, I found strong evidence of changes brought about in lives as a result of deep reading and discussion of fictional narratives. One of the best examples is Robert Waxler's "Changing Lives Through Literature" program (hereafter called CLTL), presented in Troustine & Waxler's publication *Finding a Voice: The Practise of Changing Lives Through Literature* (2005). In CLTL a literature program is offered as an alternative sentencing option, or as part of prison sentences and parole programs. Another is Jay Winsten's social marketing project presented in Howard Gardner's *Changing Minds* (2004). Winsten added vignettes to popular TV serials and especially developed advertising programs to introduce new ideas on alternative life style habits to specific target groups in local communities. Elizabeth Levy Paluck's research project using a radio soap to introduce new ideas to local communities in Rwandan was also very interesting. The results were published in her dissertation "Reducing intergroup prejudice and conflict with the mass media: A field experiment in Rwanda" (2007). David Gilmour's book *The Film Club* (2009), which relates the account of how watching films and discussing these regularly with his son over a three year period helped both their lives, is also relevant to this topic. I will offer a brief overview of these programs in the order presented.

Professor Waxler is a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth. His CLTL program provides evidence to the transformational capacity of the literary experience. CLTL has been operating in the US justice system since 1991. It is offered to convicted felons as an alternative or supplement to incarceration or probation. Results have been carefully documented by prison services and parole offices and officers since its inception. Since its inception, a marked reduction in recidivism levels among graduates has been registered, and it has facilitated the reintegration of convicted felons into mainstream society.

Many testimonials are presented and studies referenced in *Finding A Voice* (Troustine & Waxler 2005), or on the webpage "Changing Lives Through Literature: An Alternative Sentencing Program". Independent studies have also been produced like Roger Jarjoura and Susana Krumholz's (from the Indiana University and University of Massachusetts respectively) paper "Combining Bibliotherapy and Positive Role Modeling as an Alternative to Incarceration" (1998). Programs based on CLTL have also been run

in the UK from a later date and Mary Stephenson's *Stories Connect: Changing Lives Through Stories – The Handbook* (2007) presents a UK option.

When he began the program, Waxler was advised to encourage participants to think about how further education could help them get better paid jobs. However, he wryly commented that most probationers earned far more through the drug trade or bank robbery than they could ever hope to receive from legitimate jobs. Therefore, from the beginning, the central issue in CLTL was to create a genuine contact between texts and readers and to demonstrate what literature could do for individual lives. Waxler established four core principles for CLTL programs. First, all figures of authority participating in the program had to share the belief that literature can heal hearts and bring hope and rationality to broken lives. Second, since this “healing” can only happen if individual connection is made with literary texts, books would not only be read, but also reflected upon personally and discussed. Third, there would not be a teacher who “knew” the meaning of a given text, but rather a facilitator who would help each participant form a unique connection with the text. Discussion would occur in a round table format with all participants equally involved. Fourth, this could only happen if all participants took part in the project willing. Thus everyone involved, especially the offenders, must be volunteers:

Most of us involved in CLTL have always believed in literature, in its healing power, in its ability to change lives. By *literature* we mean something that makes us part of the story we are reading or discussing with others. Literature is always alive for us. It keeps us free.

When we sit around the table with criminal offenders, the probation officers and judges, colleagues and friends, we are all seduced by the plot and drawn in by the depth of characters. The story challenges us and forces us to make choices.

Waxler, for example, has always argued that by reading and then talking to each other about any good story, we get to know our limitations. It is in meeting ourselves and hearing our voice through the voice of others that hope always arrives. (Troustine & Waxler 2005: 28)

The first CLTL program was designed in 1990 and the pilot project began in 1991. Judge Robert Kane on the New Bedford County bench presented eight convicted offenders with the opportunity of attending a modern American Literature seminar facilitated by Waxler at the University of Massachusetts, as an alternative to incarceration. Kane participated in the projects because he was concerned about “the ‘turnstile justice’ he had seen in his courtroom – offenders who were sentenced to jail, and after they had served their term,

were out of the door and back into the courtroom (Troustine & Waxler, 2005: 62). Kane was willing to try this literary alternative because he loved books and wanted to find alternative options.

In order to prove that the program could work with long-term offenders Waxler, requested participants with a high level of recidivism for the first program. The eight felons who took part in this program had been convicted of a total of 148 crimes, some as serious as armed robbery. All the probationers were volunteers, who willingly agreed to participate actively in all the seminars. They know their attendance and participation would be monitored because the sentencing judge and case probation officer would also attend. If offenders did not attend the classes, do the prescribed reading and participate actively in the discussion they would be requested to leave the program, and complete their full prison sentence.

After the first four programs were run, a study compared the thirty-two participants in CLTL programs to thirty-two similar offenders who had served regular prison sentences. Only nineteen percent of CLTL graduates returned to crime, while the recidivism rate in the other group stood at forty-five percent over the same period. Significantly, despite the fact that CLTL participants had a history of violent crime, if graduates committed crimes again, there was a reduction in the level of violence involved. Over twenty years after its initial application, CLTL's results are solid and the program has gained an impetus of its own. It has continued to produce very positive results proving that literature can change lives, even those that appear to be set on a spiral of repeated criminality. CLTL has been adopted by legislators throughout Massachusetts and also in Texas, Arizona, Kansas, New York, Maine, Rhode Island and Connecticut. Florida and Indiana are also interested in the program. CLTL is being used in the United Kingdom and Canada. Recent versions of the program have targeted teen offenders as well as adults. With the proliferation of the program across state and national lines, prison boards offer CLTL in different formats: from its original form as an alternative to a prison sentence, to an educational program in jail or as part of parole programs. However, though the setting and circumstances may differ, the four core elements are always maintained.

During CLTL, participants read classical literature including novels, memoirs and short stories by authors ranging from Margaret Atwood, to George Orwell, Russell Banks to Toni Morrison, Frederick Douglass to John Steinbeck and Sylvia Platt. Programs are tailor-made for groups and facilitators select books from a very extensive list for each

group. Though there have been some mixed programs, the majority are single sex groups to ensure that the books read and discussed are relevant to each group's living situation. Jean Troustine, who works extensively with female groups, commented that often the first powerful female role models her participants encountered in their lives were found in works by female authors they read on the CLTL program (cf. Troustine & Waxler 2005: 101 - 130).

While statistics indicate positive outcomes, the most powerful statements about the transformational nature of this program were presented by graduates. Participants' testimonials demonstrate how the deep reading and discussion involved in the CLTL program enhances coping skills, promotes empathy and expands understanding. The three extracts below taken from participants on the Dorchester Men's CLTL programs, registered on the "Student Testimonials: Dorchester Men's Program (2000-2003)", page of the official "Changing Lives Through Literature" web site. They represent a tiny sample of the many testimonies available that speak to the importance of deep reading and serious discussion with peers. I picked these three from the many accounts available because they transmit three ideas repeatedly encountered in participants' testimonials. The first shows that reading books and discussion of these permitted this participant to understand and feel empathy for others. The second illustrates that reading contributed to an expanded sense of community. The third demonstrates that participating in the program fostered genuine growth in self esteem based on achievement:

Reading changes lives because it opens our eyes to the struggle and hardships of others and assures us that things at home aren't that bad at all. (Fall 2001)

[...] Another thing is, I've met white guys that I probably wouldn't have spoke to on the street, but being in this class and breaking off in groups, you get to meet and talk to them one-on-one. By being in small groups, you can get a better understanding of each man's view on life and other situations - black, white, Spanish, or what have you. (Spring 2001)

I don't know if there is one memorable thing or event that really sticks out in my mind, but I can tell you this: class has given me a sense of accomplishment. To be able to start and actually finish a project or course is a pretty good feeling. Hearing other people's ideas, problems, and opinions on stories the class has read has given me a better understanding on how people feel and think on certain issues. (Spring 2001) (n/a, n/d)

The texts are short but they tell strong, simple and powerful stories, indicating changes mediated by reflective contact with fictional narratives in a direct and straight forward narrative style.

In *The Talking Cure* (1997), Susan Vaughan proposed that in psychotherapy, the talking cure works at a cellular level changing the very neural structures that not only produce thought but also action. This idea supports Holland's proposals that "hovering" over a literary text can bring new understanding to the reader. To further illustrate the grounds for these claims, I would like to refer to two longer testimonies: Anthony's and Kim's. The first speaks to how deep reading can expand a total living experience, the second how discussing literature in a supportive non-hierarchical atmosphere is fundamental to the program's success. Anthony had been convicted for substance abuse, but when he began CLTL he had not taken drugs for over a year. Halfway through the program, he arrived at class visibly excited. The group had discussed Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) at the previous session. At that time he had not had a lot to say about the book, so the facilitator was surprised when Anthony asked if he could talk about it again in this session. Nevertheless, he let Anthony speak. Anthony explained that, between sessions, he had been seriously tempted to return to his former friends and ways - so much so that he had found himself heading back to his old supplier.

However, as he walked in that direction, Anthony remembered Hemingway's Santiago. He recalled Santiago's struggles, the physical and emotional hurt he endures and how he overcomes all these. Above all Anthony remembered how Santiago battles his own feelings of isolation, inadequacy and physical pain, and his ability to overcome misfortune and harsh conditions through perseverance. Suddenly, Anthony explained, he felt that the call to return to his old life was like the treacherous call of the sea sirens in Santiago's mind. On the street, Santiago became a real person to Anthony, one who understood Anthony's suffering because he had endured worse. Santiago "beckoned" to Anthony, and Anthony felt encouraged and did not give in to temptation:

But before he made the fatal turn that day, Anthony heard the voice of Santiago, the old man. It was as if Santiago had become his friend, a voice from literature now whispering in his heart to walk straight and endure. Anthony refused the call of his friends that day, choosing instead to saunter down the main street of that New Bedford whaling town. There is no guarantee that Anthony would always do it that way. But for that day, Santiago, the fisherman, kept Anthony alive. (Troustine & Waxler 2005: 29)

Anthony's account demonstrates how deep personal contact with literature offered an alternative that was at once proactive, self-confrontational, and non-judgmental. Anthony might not have encountered this alternative under any other circumstance. At that moment in his life it permitted him to choose a different course.

If Anthony's story speaks to the relevance of the literary contact and deep personal thinking about the ideas and themes explored in books read, Kim's illustrates the vital importance of the non-judgmental and democratic atmosphere generated in the discussion group. Kim initially participated in CLTL as part of her parole program, not because she particularly wanted to, but because it was easier to fit around her schedule than visits to her parole officer during a working day. After the program, she wrote the letter below, which is posted on the "Letter from a graduate of the Lynn-Lowell Women's Program" page of the official "Changing Lives Through Literature" web site:

The class didn't mean much to me while I was attending. My reason for joining was a suggestion as a way of making my weekly probation appointments. I was working at the time and could not schedule the appointments during work hours. In retrospect, I'm glad I attended. I don't know how much the books, the reading, and the discussions benefited me. What I 'took home' from the class was a sense of belonging, of fitting in, of not feeling so lonely and isolated in society. Being released from prison after eighteen months is very scary. Especially to someone who can't admit they have fears. Someone who has pretended to have confidence and courage for so long that the real insecure scared person can't admit it. This group was a connection. A bond with other women who all acted one way and felt totally another. I wasn't alone.

Also, attending on a weekly basis was good for the structure and self-discipline needed to adjust to this new beginning.

After giving this some thought, I also realize there was another important aspect to this group. The judge, probation officer, and teacher - all authority figures to us - they were all there for us - to listen to us, guide us, and direct us. It was their belief in the program and us that helped me deal with a lot of shame. They respected me until I could learn to respect myself. I thank them all; but my most gratitude goes to Jean. She never pushed me or directed me, but somehow she inspired me to return to school. To attend classes with people half my age who had no criminal background. She inspired me to believe I could do it as well as them, if not better, and I did. Thank you. (Kim n/d)

Kim's letter shows how difficult it can be to fit into normal life after spending time in jail, even if just eighteen months, not a long sentence if the framework of the penal system of the USA is considered.

Kim talks about how the structure of the program helped her change her mind, not only about authority figures, but also about herself. She took home a sense of belonging, which translated into feeling that she had a place in society. The involvement of authority figures who listened to her, guided, directed and even respected her before she respected herself, changed the way Kim was able to look at herself. After completing CLTL, Kim returned to school and, with the encouragement of her CLTL facilitator, obtained a college degree. Since then she has built herself a new life with a successful career and a

family. Her days spent in Lynn-Lowell Correctional Institution, and the isolation and fear she felt on leaving it, appear to be relegated to a very distant past

Judge Joseph Dever's short essay, "The Joy of My Judgeship" also presented on the testimonial link of the official "Changing Lives Through Literature" web site, shows how one of the program's officials sees it. The essay also offers the judge's interesting perspective on circumstances that can lead to lives caught up in redundant cycles of repetitive crime and how literature can offer an alternative:

When I ran the public defender's office in Essex County for 21 years, I was always struck by a phenomenon. We had an office of seven to ten attorneys serving about 50 clients per attorney.

When our clients would call the office, invariably they would identify themselves as Joe, Jack, Carol, Ted, or Mary. They fully expected that their attorney would immediately respond to them without further identification on their part. It became crystal clear that criminal defendants have a common denominator! They are totally self-absorbed, while at the same time have little or no sense of self-worth. Their view of the world is totally subjective. Objectivity is not in their lexicon.

Changing Lives Through Literature frontally attacks that unfortunate phenomenon. By reading great contemporary literature and identifying with the great characters therein, the learner begins to look at life objectively rather than subjectively. As a result, a set of values starts to take root; values that suggest alternatives to their current lifestyle. Values that suggest that all of us are capable of being better than we are.

All of the above does not happen with everyone, but I believe it happens with a majority. At the very least, our program introduces the possibility of life enrichment through reading.

In the words of C.S. Lewis: "When you read - you are never alone." This program is truly the Joy of my Judgeship (Devers, n/d).

Reading Judge Dever's essay, I was struck by his highlighting self-absorbed and a lack of self-worth as underlying characteristics common among offenders. Unfortunately, there are traits that I too have begun to see increasingly among young people in general. However, the fact that a sentencing judge could see reading as a tool that could counteract these tendencies encouraged me more and more to encounter ways of evaluating the potential influences of literary experiences.

Another remarkable quality of CTLT, from a teaching perspective, is that it creates physical and emotional conditions that permit contact between literature and a normally non-reading public. It allows participants to find their voices, to regain pride in their capacities as individuals, and to learn to look at circumstances objectively rather than subjectively. CLTL is intense and requires engagement from participants, supported

by substantial resources: three highly qualified professionals work with each group of eight participants. Reading through the records of testimonials written after different editions of the program, I was struck by the recurring presence of two characteristics – hope regained, followed by the capacity to feel empathy. The program demonstrates that literature not only permits readers to see outside themselves and understand the pain of others. It also appears to dispense hope, as it permits that disenfranchised “hardened criminals” find their voice as they understand that they are not alone in the world and have alternatives to a life of crime.

CLTL is not the only program that offers proof that contact with fictional worlds may foster change in social practices. Jay Winsten’s social marketing programs presented in Howard Gardner’s *Changing Lives* (2005) also show this. As a professor at Harvard’s School of Public Health, Winsten carried out two extended social marketing experiments on public television with the specific intention of changing habits and attitudes in specific target groups by telling appropriate fictional stories. The outcomes demonstrated that if viewers identified with messages conveyed through stories, they could adopt new attitudes and habits.

In both cases, authorities had been concerned about specific situations involving youth in different local communities. In one, police were worried about the number of serious automobile accidents involving young drivers who had consumed alcohol. In the other, the concern revolved around the high level of street violence in some neighborhoods. Winsten used TV messages in both situations to counter these habits, but he applied different approaches. In the first case, he spoke with local TV station managers to get permission to insert sub-stories in popular youth TV series. He considered that if the target groups could hear genuine and appropriate counter stories, told through a format they enjoyed, they might alter their habits. Thus Winsten’s team wrote vignettes where cool characters set up designated driver circles. Designated drivers took it in turn not to drink when they went out in groups and had to return home by car. Even though the clips wished to convey a very specific idea, Winsten’s team worked hard to make these scenes fit naturally into the storyline of the show. He understood that the vignettes could not appear as a form of propaganda or marketing. The effort was worthwhile because after the campaign, a significant reduction in the number of serious car accidents among young people was registered.

The second project was more direct because it took the form of an advertising campaign initiated in an attempt to counter a rampant increase in gang and street violence in a local

black community. In the “squash-it” campaign, figures respected by black youth turned away from fights using key phrases and gestures that all said “squash it”. Following the campaign, there was a decrease in street violence. Significantly, most youth interviewed by Winsten’s team affirmed that they had been able to turn away from a fight using the cool “squash it” gestures.

According to Winston, the main priority of social marketing is to create awareness of problematic behavioral patterns. He claims that individuals and sectors of society often persist in erroneous habits because they have never perceived these as incorrect or even questionable. Winston and his team did not encourage a reflection on interaction between fictional world and viewer as Waxler had done, however his case study shows that repeated exposure to a new idea that makes sense within the viewers’ general appreciation of an acceptable habit can lead individuals to change habits.

Another example of how people can be influenced by messages transmitted on the airways is the Rwandan case. In fact, Rwanda offers an example of how radio was used to achieve negative as well as positive influence. The 1990’s genocide of the Tutsi population by the Hutu is a well-known subject. The Rwandan radio station RTLM was accused of instigating this violence through propaganda broadcasts and two of its founders were charged with genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. In their article “The Role of Radio in the Rwandan Genocide” (1998), Kellow & Steeves’s refer to the manner in which radio transmissions helped to set the stage for this genocide. After carrying out in-depth interviews with local populations, they concluded that the radio broadcasts had encouraged the genocide by feeding into an atmosphere of fear generated by the general situation. However, they also discovered that while many Rwandans were influenced by the radio broadcasts, others resisted peer pressure and the radio’s directives to violence (*cf.* Kellow & Steeves 1998: 122-126).

Despite its negative past, radio in general and radio soap operas in particular, continued to be very popular in Rwanda at the beginning of the 21st century. Therefore, Princeton’s Elizabeth Levy Paluck developed a project to evaluate how exposure to a radio soap, which had been engineered to tell a particular message, would influence Rwandans’ attitudes and beliefs. Paluck set out to determine if radio soaps could be used to change individual thinking and influence collective beliefs. She carried out a year-long field experiment in which two volunteer groups listened to different radio soaps. One group listened to a regular soap, the other to one whose main story line contained dialogues about reducing intergroup prejudice and violence. It also carried a strong sub-

plot involving a Romeo and Juliet type love story, a forbidden love between young people from the two ethnic groups. As in Winsten's social marketing, great care was taken with the actual quality of the narrative presented. The story was well written by Rwandan screen writers and set against the background of normal Rwandan life.

The trial results published in "Reducing intergroup prejudice and conflict with the mass media: A field experiment in Rwanda" (2007), showed that listening to the "social marketing" soap increased tolerance. Interestingly, Paluck included group discussion in the project. The responses she received indicated that this had been vital. She also noted that humour and imagination contributed positively to the outcomes obtained:

The radio program affected listeners' perceptions of and behaviors toward some of the most critical issues for Rwanda's post conflict society, such as ethnic intermarriage, open dissent, empathy and trust. This pattern of effects was manifested in self-reported attitudes, group discussions, and behavior in collective-decision making. On the whole the results strongly suggest that radio can effectively communicate social norms that contribute to intergroup tolerance and reconciliation.

The radio intervention was multifaceted, which raises questions regarding which of the many factors at play were responsible for the changes in participants' perceived norms and behaviors. I discuss such factors highlighted in the current study, such as group discussion, humor and imagination, which are part of the social and phenomenological experience of media consumption in the real world (13)

Paluck concluded that the project demonstrated clear evidence of the media's impact on intergroup prejudice and conflict. However, while listening to the radio program seemed to influence positively collective codes governing intergroup behaviour, she also noted that it had not seemed to be able to change beliefs on what could be personally possible or an option for listeners (*cf.* Paluck 2007: 101).

While Waxler and Winsten's projects concentrated on the individual, Paluck's looked to the community. Paluck's experiment seems to indicate that contact with fictional worlds can change collective opinions. The process appears to benefit from discussion, and humor and imagination were also relevant. All of the models discussed so far emphasise on importance of discussion or reflection to permit the literary object to act as a transitional or transformational object. However, Paluck's study was the first instance of the relevance of humor and imagination within this context.

Another interesting story in this context is David Gilmour's personal account presented in *The Film Club: A Memoir* (2008). In this book he relates how watching films with his teenage son, Jesse, helped father and son maintain a healthy relationship and aided both of them to overcome very serious problems in their lives. It may appear

shallow, compared to large-scale projects like CLTL, Winsten's social marketing and Paluck's Rwandan radio soap. However, I was particularly interested in this book as it deals with film. Also, when I read the book I was starting to work with teens Jesse's age.

Jesse, Gilmour's son, despite being intelligent and convivial and performing well in school up until the ninth grade, desperately wanted to drop out of formal education in the tenth grade. It was a difficult phase. Gilmour, a writer who could not write and a father who could not help his son, felt like a failure both professionally and personally. He felt he had become an ineffectual onlooker (and potentially a jailor) as he strove to help his generally convivial, bright son deal with his difficulties. Alarmed, he realized that insisting on Jesse's remaining in school could lead him into a destructive lifestyle. Therefore, in a preemptive strike, Gilmour offered Jesse an alternative: if Jesse promised not to consume drugs, and to watch and discuss three movies a week with his father, he could drop out of school. The book documents Gilmour's efforts to connect meaningfully with his son through the films they watched together over the following three years. After this time, Jesse decided that it was time to move on to the next stage of his life. The meaningful discussion of film seemed to have given Jesse an effective alternative education as he received a high school equivalence diploma when he applied for it and was accepted into a film program in the University of Toronto. He later started his undergraduate studies there.

Gilmour is quick to point out that he was not sure if the films themselves were the most important elements in the work. He wryly comments that he was often surprised at Jesse's disdain for some of his classic favorites. Nevertheless, at the end of the three years he did feel that the scheduled times spent together discussing their often very different reactions to movies had been the most importance thing.

The programs discussed above reminded me of a phenomenon I had observed in my own classroom. For many years I had taught English language in a business school. The proposed curricula did not afford many opportunities to teach literature formally, but students quickly learned that I loved books and films. Those students who enjoyed literature got into the habit of talking about books they were reading or films they had seen. Over an extended period, I observed that students who had the habit of reading books or watching movies and talking about these, seemed to deal with their daily lives better than others who did not. Initially I had considered the two circumstances to be merely coincidental. However, my reading made me wonder if my students' engagement

with film and literature was not playing an important role in helping them deal with situations in their daily lives.

To try to gain some insight into this, I sent out a circular email to undergraduate students and some middle school students asking them to identify a film or films that had marked their life and to explain their choice (Ap:5-6). Volunteers answered the simple question below:

I would like to know if you have a film or films that has/have marked you - made you change your mind about an issue or just made you feel better about yourself or that simply helped you to relax.

If you have a film like that please send me a mail and tell me about it. (Ap:5)

This initial enquiry cast some interesting light on the kind of movies viewers connect with and how significant connections are formed. These points were influential in my later work. Some volunteers picked films like Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown* (2005) which in broad terms would fit into Perrine and Arp's definition of escape literature. However, even though the film tells a simple story of escape, volunteer nine's comments showed that the connection between viewer and movie was both powerful and positive. Volunteer nine was a 14 year-old middle school student at the time of the enquiry. When describing how *Elizabethtown* influenced her, she simply wrote "It lets me breathe" (Ap: 6). Later, when I asked her to expand on this short statement, she said that she felt that *Elizabethtown* was the film for "that moment in her life". She had had others and hoped to have more. She explained that she watched the film when she felt under pressure, when she felt things were getting too much for her. Watching *Elizabethtown* helped her relax and helped her get things back into perspective. It brought her peace. Laughing along with the movie diffused the pressure and things became manageable again. Perhaps Perrine and Arp might say, as the protagonist got his happy ending, so did she.

Thinking about the angst associated with adolescence, I thought that any film that could really allow a young girl "to breathe" was performing a powerful role. Her answer also seemed to support Holland's proposal that the viewer must pursue the connection the film makes with him/her to be able to transfer the experience beyond the actual viewing of the film. I wondered if volunteer nine had to watch the movie repeatedly because she did not understand her connection to it, and if this was linked to her youth in any way.

Volunteer four, a 24 year-old female at the time of the trial, selected Nick Cassavetes's *The Notebook* (2004) as one of the films that had marked her life. Though it

has a direct narrative style, this film does not follow all the characteristics of literature of escape because it does not have the conventional happy ending. However, volunteer four did not connect with the ending, but the idea the film portrayed for her was that love can conquer all. She wrote:

There are a lot of movies that I like but only two have touched me in a deep way! The first one is called *The Notebook*. It is a love story inspired in Nicholas Sparks' book. After seeing that movie I realized or at least it made me believe more that in love anything is possible. No matter how far you are, no matter how much is trying to tearing you apart when you find real love it remains forever and destiny always finds a way to set things right. I guess I am just an hopeless romantic but it's definitely one of my all time favorite movies (Ap: 5)¹⁸

So watching *The Notebook* reinforced volunteer four's belief in love. In general I noted in volunteers' writings that even when the film itself did not follow a true literature of escape storyline, when viewers created connections with the movie that had characteristics of escape literature, this narrative, created between viewer and movie, had a positive influence on viewers. This was particularly obvious in the case of volunteer two's connection with Roberto Benigni's *A Vita é Bela* (1997), volunteer seven selection of Peter Weir's *Dead Poet's Society* (1989) and volunteer four's association with the other film she selected, Sean Penn's *Into the Wild* (2007). Despite the fact that all these films end with death and different degrees of tragedy, volunteers wrote straightforward texts demonstrating that their individual connection with the movie constructed strong heroes and happy endings. Volunteer two's texts offers an example of the construction of her own happy ending:

Well, talking about films, the one that made me change my point of view, and made me change my way of thinking was "A Vita é Bela ". Even though you must cry a lot when you see it, you can find lots of comedy in the middle, which gives you a "bittersweet" sensation! Besides, you can see the relationship father-son, the love they bring in the difficult times of the II World War! (Ap: 5)

In volunteer two's connection to *A Vita é Bela*, the hero is very evident, but in her reading of the story his death is replaced by the legacy of his love and she constructs a happy ending in her simple narrative describing why she connected with the film.

Volunteer four's response to Sean Penn's *Into the Wild* (2007) follows a similar pattern. This film does not have a happy ending either, but it has a strong hero and she

¹⁸ When volunteers wrote in English, I maintained their texts as they were sent to me. At times there are slight mistakes, but I wished to maintain the tone of the original answers.

identifies with him. Again her connection with the movie appeared to give her a happy ending, even though the young hero dies. Volunteer four wrote:

The second one is called *Into the Wild* [...] It's the most AMAZING movie ever! What I learnt from that movie was that when you have dreams you need to believe in them deeply and in yourself, you need to fight for what you want and for your life no matter how crazy it may seem.

Like they say "I read somewhere how important it is in life not necessarily to be strong but to feel strong!" "When you want something you just gotta reach out and grab it!"

It's such a life lesson! Not be afraid to follow [follow] your dreams no matter how high they can be! (Ap: 5-6)

Despite, the hero's wasteful death, volunteer four's interaction with the film gave her a happy ending to as it led her to conclude that she did not need to be afraid of following her dreams. This contradicted much of the global TV news coverage confronting her daily, but her connection with the movie seemed to justify her desire to have an alternative way of being in the world. I was also struck by the fact that she quotes directly from the script of the film. The text she quoted also appears on the movie trailer, so it would be an easy to memorize. Still, her quotation implies reflection and personalisation of the film's message.

A similar situation occurred with volunteer seven, a 20 year-old female at the time of the trial. She chose *The Dead Poets Society* which has heroes, strong role models but it is not comforting and does not have a happy ending. Yet she never refers to this ending. In her text she wrote:

[...] *Dead Poets Society* with that revolutionary teacher played by Robin Williams marked me very much. I've seen the film several times, I love the setting, (I also love the setting and music of *Out of Africa*, I feel like flying!), the words *Carpe Diem* help me to focus on what's important by seizing the day with little things (Ap: 6).

It would appear that she connected with the hero and finds the film encouraging (despite its ending) because an expression repeatedly used in it, "Carpe Diem," encapsulates a philosophy in life that she wants to believe in. She wrote, "the words help me to focus on what's important by seizing the day with little things". Therefore, perhaps it can be said that even if the story of the film does not contain all the elements of a literature of escape, volunteer seven's narrative with *The Dead Poets Society* does. Significantly, she also wrote that she has seen the film several times. Perhaps, as Holland had proposed,

repetition and reflection allowed her to understand her connection to the movie and transfer it into her own living experience.

I was struck by another general trend in volunteers' answers. Though they vary from simple commentaries to highly personal statements, they reflect how a particular film (or part of a film) had spoken personally to minds and life at a moment in time. Moreover, it was always significant when volunteers could articulate why they connected with the movie or idea transmitted in the movie. This articulation seemed to permit the maintenance of the experience beyond the actual viewing period.

Also all the volunteers viewed the movie of choice repeatedly. However, while the older volunteers identified specifically what they connected with in the movie and wrote short but powerful texts about how the sentiments expressed in these scenes influenced their lives, the younger volunteer (nine) did not really know why she connected with the movie of her choice. She felt relief while watching the movie. However, unlike volunteers seven who used the expression "Carpe Diem" to help her focus on the "little battles" of her daily life, volunteer nine had no support to help her extend the movie-going experience beyond the actual act of watching the film.

Another interesting point that appeared when reviewing volunteers' texts was that they did not mention special effects, and only two referred to technical aspects of the films they had chosen. Volunteer three liked the "butterfly effect" used in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972), but she did not expand on this. Volunteer six, a 21 year-old male, appreciated Paul Higgis's direction in *Crash* (2004). He appreciated the film technically and wrote: "I think! It's a great movie, very well directed that talks about the relationships between people in our day-to-day life". He discussed the plotlines it explored and the themes it explored. However, though he obviously enjoyed the film and it made him think about powerful issues, he concluded: "It is a very sad movie because we realize that after all we don't live in a world so-called perfect and free of discrimination" (Ap: 6).

Perhaps this conclusion is the type of expansion of the living experience that Perrine and Arp expected readers would undergo when contemplating literature of interpretation. Volunteer six's response demonstrated that unlike other volunteers, he did not construct a literature of escape narrative in his connection with the movie. Therefore, at this initial stage of my investigation, I considered that it would be beneficial to understand more about the construction of literature of escape narratives that identify and document the connection between movie and viewer and permit viewers to carry the

movie-going experience beyond the actual event. I wanted to ascertain if contact with movies involving reflection and contemplation could offer alternative paradigms to viewers.

These initial volunteers' texts alerted me to another point. Though they are very short, they express profound sentiments and appear to reflect changes in habit patterns and beliefs. This demonstrated to me that texts do not necessarily have to be long to be significant. These ideas encouraged me to try to find methods that would permit people who connected with literary objects to write "simple" texts that would let them understand this connection and maybe act as vehicles that might extend the positive influence of the film beyond the immediate viewing period.

Thinking along these lines I was reminded of the recent personal experience of rereading Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). Because of this literary encounter, I started to think about the problems associated with being raised in poverty, and to consider the circumstances faced by people raised in ghettos, social projects or the sprawling shanty towns springing up around cities in the developing world. I was amazed that contact with this novel, written about a time and a place far removed from my own circumstances, could affect not only my understanding but also my sentiments about conditions I had never endured and presumably were not contemplated by the author. In a similar manner to CLTL graduates, exposure to Huck Finn's world not only introduced me to living experiences outside of my own, it expanded my total living experience and increased my capacity to feel empathy with circumstances not personally experienced.

These notions led to my reconsidering the influence exerted by other literary works on expanding social consciousness. As already mentioned, even if the evidence is not as indisputable as the statistics supporting the CLTL program, the public reactions to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* when published bear witness to the role this story played in changing minds and lives. Her warm and sympathy-winning narrative appeared to give people an alternative view and seemed to allow readers change their opinions about slavery. Charles Dickens employed a similar technique in his novels. Writing well drawn stories with humanity and humor, Dickens drew attention to many flagrant, but not openly seen or recognized problems of Victorian England. In *The Pickwick Papers* (1836) and *Little Dorrit* (1857) he allowed ordinary middle- and upper-class citizens to understand the plight of those in debtor's prisons. Change is rarely attributable to a single factor; however, it is significant that both the Fleet and Marshalsea Prisons were closed shortly after the publication of Dickens's novels. *Oliver Twist* (1839)

drew a moving picture of the plight of orphans driven to stealing and women consigned to prostitution because of their circumstances. *Hard Times* (1854) illustrated poignantly that, even for free-born people, the circumstances of birth can determine whether one is seen as an individual or a tool to perform a function. Sentences such as “Hands – a race who would have found more favour with some people, if providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or like the lower classes of sea creatures, only hands and stomachs” (Dickens 2004: 66), showed that many owners of mills, even those with good intentions, might have thought of their workers as extensions of the machines that made their comfortable world possible.

Karl Marx paid high tribute to Victorian writers in the August 1st edition of the 1854 New York Tribune. He wrote that Dickens and his contemporaries had performed an important role in informing the British reading public about social matters and done more for the social conditions of the working classes than the professional politicians who professed to support their cause:

The present splendid brotherhood of fiction-writers in England, whose graphic and eloquent pages have issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together, have described every section of the middle class (Marx: 1976).

However, though the circumstances that Twain, Dickens and Beecher-Stowe wrote about are no longer extant, their novels, are still very much read today. I learned many things from the programs previously reviewed and they gave me ideas for the kind of activities I should think of including in my practical trials. First, positive results were obtained with all the media used, whether books, TV shows, radio soaps or movies, and each research concentrated on one medium form alone in their work. So, it should not be problematic to limit my practical work exclusively to film, especially if this would enhance the reliability and internal coherence of the trial.

Second, that even when narratives were written for the sole sake of the projects that they were used in, as occurred with Winsten’s social marketing project or Paluck’s radio soap, they were deliberately carefully constructed literary objects. Therefore, engaging with fictional narratives can help to changes people’s minds about issues that are important to them. Third, that all the programs referred to the importance of the discussion and so the narrative object used in practical trials should encourage this.

Finally, the written responses registered by my own initial volunteers and by graduates on CLTL programs demonstrated that short direct texts could be very

revealing. This finding encouraged me to think about including a simple self-reporting, open-answer questionnaire to group film screenings. I wondered if the articulation of why they connected with a movie could help viewers transfer positive emotions felt at this time beyond the actual viewing period as had occurred with the original older volunteers on the initial trial. Moreover the literary, radio, TV and film programs reviewed, demonstrated that reading/watching/listening to and discussing (in most cases) set books/films/vignettes in TV series/TV advertisements/radio soap operas changed people's minds and habits. This idea encouraged me to add some type of set movie watching element to my research project, to observe trends in groups. These considerations led to think about the type of movies to show at this stage.

Winsten claimed that the first step in changing problematic behavior is to question its legitimacy (*cf.* Gardner 2004: 127 – 130). Perhaps the movies could challenge some conventional even if inappropriate wisdom and strip attitudes inherited from social and cultural legacies. Also considering Marx's comments, on the social benefits obtained by Victorian novelists, I thought that it would be relevant to seek movies transmitting the same type of well drawn personal narrative relevant to contemporary society. They could appear to be "simple stories" because I would seek narratives that viewers could engage easily with and might have the structure of literature of escape, containing heroes, a coherent narrative, happy endings. However, I aspired to use films that could also challenge conventional wisdom on issues relevant to contemporary society as Twain, Beecher-Stowe and Dickens had done.

But what literary form did they use to achieve this? I asked this question because I wanted to know what types of films to show on group screenings that these could have the maximum effect. Perhaps Hamlin Hill offers an answer to this question in the Introduction to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1987) when he writes: "Ultimately, it is Huck's voice that seduces us. His candour, his honesty, his poetry so hypnotize us that we forget to wonder where Huck learned his language" (xvii). Maybe just as Sullivan Harper proposed Boyd and Simple's direct dialogues helped an emergent population of African Americans come to term with a new identity in a changing society, Twain's terse fictional prose delivered by the young vagabond allowed me to connect with experiences I had never felt. Huck Finn's character did not have the ability to reason as he did, but the language Twain gave him attributed this capacity to him, and eventually to me as a reader. I wondered if I could find a contemporary film, whose author/director attributed the same traits to its characters.

1.5 Approaches not used in this study

At present quite a number of new lines of research combine the study of the sciences and the humanities. Therefore, I think it relevant at this point to establish how my approach relates to or differs from these. Two fields in particular are relevant, those of Neurocinematics and Literary Darwinism.

The emerging field of Neurocinematics, the study of the neuroscience of film viewing, introduced by Uri Hasson, a professor of Psychology at Princeton University, in the article “Neurocinematics: The Neuroscience of Film” (2008), is quite fascinating. Combining cognitive neuroscience and film studies, Hasson and his team determine how different types of editing techniques influence the manner in which the physical brain interacts with film. In their experiments, Hasson’s team uses scientific procedures and equipment - functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) combined with inter-subject correlation analysis (ISC) - to achieve this end. However, an understanding of how the physical brain engages with film as a function of editing and production techniques used is not central to this work.

Neither will I apply the evolutionary psychology orientation at the core of Literary Darwinism. This emergent field considers that literature is important because it offers evolutionary advantages. Literary Darwinism reflects on the larger facts of human biology and evolution in order to examine the role that stories and literature may have played in moulding minds and forming society throughout the ages. When reviewing the field in *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature and Literature* (2004), Joseph Carroll suggests that literature helps human evolutionary development as human nature has inspired writers/creators and readers/listeners to produce and partake in stories throughout the ages, whether they belong to pre-historic tribes, simple societies still existing today in undeveloped parts of the world, or complex post-modern societies. (*cf.* Carroll 2004:203-215).

I will not pursue this approach because I think it follows a line of enquiry akin to Plato’s deterministic position. Both Plato and the Literary Darwinists ask whether simple exposure to codes of conduct can lead the reader/viewer/listener to consider these acceptable. However, I am interested in the relationship of the two, as isolated objects. Therefore, I intent to emphasise not only exposure to fictional worlds, but also reflection

and discussion. I wish to investigate the personal and individual “in-between space” between the viewer and the movie.

Many of the film I will review in this study are light and would be regarded by many as “pieces of fluff”. Therefore, it may seem strange that I will borrow from Harold Bloom’s “Western Canon” to explain the type of interaction between film and viewer I wish to pursue in this research. However, his statement that the purpose of reading should be to encourage our internal dialogue with ourselves and suggestion that reading to “obtain” a certain or predefined meaning is not reading at all, are very relevant to the ideas I wish to pursue in my practical work:

Scholars who urge us to find the source of our morality and our politics in Plato, or in Isaiah, are out of touch with the social reality in which we live. If we read the Western Cannon in order to form our social, political or personal moral values, I firmly believe we will become monsters of selfishness and exploitation. To read in the service of any ideology is not, in my judgement, to read at all. The reception of aesthetic power enables us to learn to talk to ourselves and how to endear ourselves. [...] The mind’s dialogue with itself is not primarily a social reality. All that the Western Cannon can bring one is the proper use of one’s own solitude, that solitude whose final form is one’s confrontation of one’s own mortality. (Bloom 1996: 29-30)

By helping the viewer to understand the space between him/herself and a favourite film, I too aspired to assist in an increased awareness of self that I hoped could lead to a “proper use of solitude”.

1.6 General Objectives for Working Methods

All the literature programs I reviewed were very inspiring but unfortunately their great strengths also exposed their weaknesses. First, while practical applications using written, TV and radio texts as well as film demonstrated real and concrete results, programs usually only targeted one population group or one aspect of the contact between fictional worlds and receptors. Therefore, though the individual results registered could be indicative of more global results, researchers and field operators did not appear to have a desire to move outside their particular field of operation.

Second, there was little effort to analyse the results within the context of scientific research that could support them. Therefore, even when repeatable methods produced consistent results as in the case of repeated CLTL programs or Paluck's statistical study, because outcomes are not placed within the context of what is scientifically possible, the scientific community has difficulty in accepting that something as abstract as involvement with fictional worlds can change lives. Thus, the programs are not given the relevance they deserve, and outcomes are seen as extraordinary, but whimsical.

Third, as Anthony's case demonstrates, the effects are often felt after the event, under circumstances that cannot be predicted or controlled because they are part of the individual's response to real life events. Stories like Anthony's are highly relevant, because they indicate how people's lives can be changed by genuine contact with literature. However, as they are experienced in the midst of a dynamic life that is hardly amenable to measurement, it is difficult for scientific minds to consider that this type of change could occur on a repeated basis, and be the result of connecting significantly with fictional characters. These incidents cannot be quantified in the laboratory, but that does not mean that they are any less relevant or real.

Anthony clearly states how Santiago's character spoke to him of alternatives to easy options and opened his mind to the possibility of resistance. However in terms of general readers, Anthony was in a privileged position as his mind was being educated to actively contemplate connections with fictional characters. A mind, not prepared in this way, might not be able to understand the interaction between mind and book or transmit this and so the relevance of the contact with literature could be lost. Therefore, I proposed

to develop method that would encourage this type of active interaction between viewer and movie.

Chapter Two

Free Associative Film Analysis

This chapter follows my first interactions with free associative film analysis: learning about it as presented in *Meeting Movies* (2006), supported by principles laid out in *Know Thyself* (2008), applying it myself and teaching it to volunteers. The principles behind Holland's free associative analysis were referred to generally in Chapter One, as was its connection to Heinz Lichtenstein's concept of unique identity theme. However, at this point it is necessary to present Holland's method in more detail because this provided the basis for my use and teaching of free associative film analysis.

In *Meeting Movies* Holland analyses eight films: Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942), Marcel Carné's *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945), Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957) and *Persona* (1966), Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), John Houston's *Freud* (1962), Federico Fellini's *Otto e Mezzo* (1963) and John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998). Holland wrote that he had selected these movies because they mattered intimately to him, even though they generated different emotions in him. Some like *Casablanca* and *Shakespeare in Love* were personal favourites, while others though appreciated at an intellectual level bothered Holland tremendously. In fact, he found them deeply disturbing and emotionally uncomfortable as illustrated by his reaction to *Persona*:

THIS IS A GREAT FILM, EVERYONE SAYS, THE FINEST FILM OF PERHAPS the greatest director of the twentieth century – and I don't enjoy it. Oh, I admire it all right, but I don't like seeing it. I agree that it's a great film, but for me a singularly unpleasant and painful one. These two women on the island, focused into themselves and their deepening relationship – it's too much for me. It's the closeness that I can't stand, the intensity of it. (Holland 2006a: 95)

However, despite this strong negative reaction, Holland reviewed *Persona* because it was one of the films that came to mind when he made his free associative choice. Also, regardless of the variance in personal reactions to the movies, pursuing his connection to films free associatively helped Holland understand himself. He wrote: "Meeting these movies [even the ones that caused disquiet], I met myself" (12).

Reading Holland's reviews in *Meeting Movies* can be a little disconcerting at first as the author flits between free associations and interpretative/analytical thought sequences¹. Holland distinguishes clearly between his free associative writing and his interpretative contributions by presenting the former in italics and the latter in straight

¹ During the course of this work the terms interpretative and analytical will be used as synonyms indicating literary analysis performed using reasoning and conscious deliberation.

face print². This can be seen in the above quotation, which begins analytically and then moves onto a free associative string. The example illustrates how vital the change in type face is for the reader's comprehension. The texts would be very difficult to follow without this because the free associative strings while insightful can be highly personal, and sometimes appear to ramble and explore topics that are unrelated to the scenes/concepts being analyzed or even the movie. However, at the end they always raise a significant personal point that may not even be directly related to the movie or scene itself. The analytical strings are thoughtful and analytical, expressing both personal and contemporary perspectives. They reflect a vast knowledge of the films themselves, their critical acclaim and historic context.

In *Meeting Movies*, Holland uses free associative analysis practically to obtain an increased awareness about how he interacts with the world, and to instruct readers on how to do the same. Therefore, it differs from his earlier free associative literary analysis publications, like *Five Readers Reading* (1975) where he built identity theme profiles for readers. The theories of psychoanalytical literary criticism, Lichtenstein's unique identity theme and the construction of identity theme profiles are placed at the centre of *5 Readers Reading*. However, a simpler and more practical approach is applied in *Meeting Movies*. The emphasis is on the practical understanding of lifestyle tendencies and the appropriateness of life choices. The text can be understood by the non-psychoanalytically trained mind because there is little technical jargon, and procedures are explained within the context of an everyday life. Perhaps for this reason Heinz Lichtenstein's work only appears as a bibliographic reference. Nevertheless, a reader who is knowledgeable of Lichtenstein's unique identity theme theory can see influences of this concept in Holland's review of his associative writing in *Meeting Movies*. Holland's instructions are clearly presented, thus one does not need to be an expert on Lichtenstein's theory to understand either the principles or techniques laid out in *Meeting Movies*. Also the range of films analysed and the contours that the criticism follows mean that the reader is offered sufficient practical exemplification to permit independence from spawning theories.

² I maintain the system both when quoting from Holland's texts and when referring to volunteers' film analysis.

2.1 The method itself and Holland's application to *Casablanca* (1942) and other films

As mentioned already, Holland's free associative film criticism uses two processes, free associative analysis sequences, *presented in italic text*, and interpretative sequences in basic font. Though Holland emphasises the free associative texts, the analytical texts are no less important. Peppering the complete criticism, they often act as catalysts for free associative sequences. In fact, Holland's free associative criticism is normally initiated by an interpretative sequence. In turn the final phrases in a free associative sequence, normally stimulates a new analytical string.

Holland begins most of his critiques with a short plot summary but, in the case of *Casablanca*, he dispenses with this, simply writing: "This is the one movie I'll write about and not have to retell the plot. Doesn't every one of you know this movie by heart?" (Holland 2006a: 17). With this question Holland plunges his readers into his free associative method as he questions free associatively why viewers respond to some films and not to others, or why some films become classics and others do not. This free associative line ends with Holland concluding: "*The director and his crew put something "in" the movie, and the spectators take something out. [...] In a way, it is an old-fashioned stimulus-response model.*" (17). However, as Holland considers elements that are "in" the movie analytically, he is not content with this free associative solution. He concludes: "You could point, for example, to the elegance and economy of the original screenplay, [...] Do people *love* that neatness? I doubt it" (18). Therefore, he continues his analytical analysis to try to understand why some films become classics and others do not. This rational questioning leads Holland to conclude, "I feel good about it [Casablanca]. I feel good, when I remember the movie and think about it like now. Why? Because of goodness" (19).

One thing that is very significant in this type of criticism is that, even if the analytical sequences yield apparently simplistic and childish expressions, like "Because of goodness" above, these are usually relevant. Therefore, even if the terminal phrase of a string may seem trivial, it should be evaluated since the conclusions of all strings are potentially relevant and normally act as the initiators of the next sequence, independent of whether it is free associative or analytical. Reading the rest of Holland's review, one appreciates that this simple statement about goodness will actually offer the key to

unravel the significance of the film for Holland and so this statement is central to the review, despite its apparent simplicity.

Free associating to the idea of feeling good about *Casablanca* returns Holland to when he first watched the movie at the age of fifteen, as well as to recent viewings. He realizes that over the years from this first viewing, he has wrapped the film in “*quilts of nostalgia and sentiment*” (19). Free associating on his nostalgic relationship with *Casablanca* Holland concludes; “*it no longer has a historical reality for me. Yet the first thing that comes to mind when I think about this movie is a historical reality, World War II*” (19). This free associative string leads Holland to reflect analytically on the historical context of the film’s release and his first viewing of the movie. The circumstances surrounding *Casablanca*’s release were dismal, occurring as it did one year after Pearl Harbor when the outcome of the war was very unsure. Europe was still under Hitler’s rule as the Allies had not yet begun the European invasion.

However, analytically, Holland reflects that the movie did not refer to the real timeframe. It was placed in an ambiguous location, neutral Morocco, at a somewhat ambiguous time, ending “on December 4, 1941, just three days before Pearl Harbor” (20). The ambiguity of both time and place lead Holland to return free associatively to his own “ambiguous” experience of the war. When Holland free associates to how the war affected him, he is confronted with the reality that, due to age or health issues, neither he nor any of his family members were eligible to fight in the war: “*We suffered neither deaths in our family nor hardship*” (20). Holland’s family unit endured rationing, had blackout curtains, saved to buy War Bonds, and was affected by the general fear of the consequences if the Allies lost; still, “*the war was real and not real to me*” (21). Also, his lack of involvement makes him feel both lucky and unlucky, because “*in the war, I was not a man*” (21).

Continuing along this string brings up further ambiguities. He remembers when he first saw pictures of concentration camps. At the time he thought they had to be part of “*baiting of the Germans*” (21). Holland had a German grandfather whom he loved dearly. Because of his granddad he believed that “*Germans are good people*” (21) who could not be responsible for those atrocities. This flow leads him to contemplate other ambiguities, namely his acceptance of his parents’ mistrust of Roosevelt. Influenced by them, he considered that Roosevelt could have hatched “*some Communist scheme to entangle us in European affairs and interfere with American profit-making*” (21). Then his free associative thought progresses to his college years, when he learned the truth

about the war from colleagues in the university, veterans on GI Bills, “*I heard from them what the war was really like, stories that ranged from long boredoms to total terror*” (21). His associations allow him to investigate his ambiguities in relationship with World War II and realise when and how he eventually embraced the truth.

These free associative thoughts also lead him to remember that when listening to his college friends’ tales, he had imagined himself as a war correspondent. Thus he realizes free associatively that, even in the safety of his imagination, he never saw himself as an active soldier, but in the role of “*the outsider, the observer, the listener*”. He accepts free associatively that he had always seen himself outside the war, even though it influenced him and shaped his life greatly: “*So far as the war was concerned, I succeeded, even though looking back I think it shaped my life in deep and countless ways*” (22).

This free associatively string does not follow a clear line as it flits from contemplation of actual events that occurred and the hypothetical consideration of emotional and psychological factors that might have lead to Holland’s thoughts, actions and attitudes in relation to these. For example, he often questions why he always sees himself as an observer in his relationship with World War II. He questions if this was due to the fact that he was, in fact, an observer of the war, or whether this position is provoked by other underlying issues. He does not answer this question, but asking it makes him realize that though he was not directly involved in the war, he was still shaped by it. He concludes free associatively that this type of analysis is important to him because: “*In this book [Meeting Movies] I stand outside myself, watching me, or, more accurately, I am stretched out horizontally in the psychoanalytic posture*” (22).

Once Holland has made peace with these mainly factual aspects of his ambiguous relationship with World War II, he returns to analyse the concept of goodness as represented in the film. He begins this with a free associative string: “*When I listen to myself, I can tell that I love this movie because the three leading characters turn out, at the end, to be so splendidly good*” (22). This contemplation of goodness will lead to deeper reflection as, analytically, Holland identifies that *Casablanca* presents two forms of goodness. One is a form of goodness associated with being capable in a manly way: “One ‘goodness’ means you are good *at* something. You’re good at running a night club, arranging things, fighting for the Loyalists in Spain, good at love – as Rick is, as Bogart always seemed.” (22) The other form of goodness is associated with moral standing and character, “there is ‘goodness’ that means you’re a

good person, noble and moral, and this kind of goodness can apply to both men and women” (22). Rationally trying to understand what lies behind the different definitions of goodness, Holland describes the former as “goodness-as-potency”, and the latter as “goodness-as-nobility”. He identifies Rick as a prime example of the former and Laszlo of the latter. For the sake of clarifying the definitions, as well as classifying two forms of goodness, Holland places the characters that populate the movie into three categories: good people, ambiguous people and bad people. Despite his “goodness-as-potency”, Rick initially represents ambiguous people. He is good at running a nightclub; good at handling life in hazy Casablanca, even, rumour has it, good at fighting for the Loyalists in Spain, but he is ambiguous in terms of the war. In this reading, the Germans are bad people with no potential for “goodness-as-nobility” despite exhibiting “goodness-as-potency”. Laszlo, a truly good person, is the epitome of “goodness-as-nobility”. Yet, despite his moral fortitude, he is not good at surviving in Casablanca without Rick’s “goodness-as-potency” being necessary for the survival of Laszlo’s “goodness-as-nobility” (33).

Towards the end of the movie, Rick has to kill a German officer to permit Ilsa and Laszlo’s escape. However, Holland concludes analytically, according to the moral framework of the film this killing promotes Rick to the category of good rather than bad, because Rick’s motives are selfless and pure. Thus Rick becomes the total hero, embodying both “goodness-as-potency” and “goodness-as-nobility”. According to the analytical and free associative interpretations Holland developed around the concept of goodness, the German officer’s murder does not matter for a number of reasons. First, as a “bad” person, he does not need to be given the opportunity to reform himself as Rick and Renault were. Second, the killing does not happen in America but in ambiguous Casablanca. Therefore it does not matter.

One is left to question, what is the purpose of this totally imaginary construct derived from Holland’s free associative analysis? When Holland follows his thought to understand why he build this interpretative model for *Casablanca*, he comprehends that this is important for him because it allows him to consider that ambiguous, imperfect people, demonstrating questionable behaviour in lesser circumstances, can rise to the call of duty when they need to. Rick possesses the manly quality of “goodness-as-potency” but, like Holland, he is not “*in the war*” (21). In fact, Rick is even worse than Holland because, he is not an underage teen, but an able-bodied man who is running a bar in Morocco serving Germans instead of fighting in the war. He watches the police

carry Ugarte to his death without blinking and appears unaffected by the plight of the refugees and famously declares ‘I stick my neck out for nobody’” (23). Still, the course of the film offers Rick the capacity to add “goodness-as- nobility” to his “goodness-as-potency” and so he can become a good person.

Rick’s change of heart and his choice to ascend to a higher moral level acquit Holland of feelings of guilt. His connection with the movie presents him with other characters who had ambiguous attitudes towards the war, but who made “the right decision” in critical circumstances. This offers Holland the possibility to think that he too might have followed a similar pattern if called on to do so. He writes: *Like a child I find that immensely gratifying. But goodness plays into my own feeling of not having been a man at war* (22). Rick exonerates Holland from his guilt at having been relatively unaffected by the war: “*Yes, yes people are good after all! What a great feeling and a triumphant denial³! And a denial and an escape that I, when I stop and think, feel ashamed of, an escape from the war [...] I use the film to let myself off the hook.*” (35). This association to *Casablanca* offers him absolution and hope, as it demonstrates that others, who had an ambiguous relationship with the war, were able to embody the forms of goodness he craves: *goodness-as-potency* and *goodness-as-nobility* when called on and so were absolved. This awareness allows him to see the ambiguities he feels about his relationship to the film, leading him into further strings of analysis, as he tries to gain more insight into why he feels as he does about the film, notions of goodness and how these tie into his concepts of patriotism:

No doubt I stretch things. I do read the film, though, as identifying patriotic bravery both with goodness-as-nobility and goodness-as-potency. If you join the war, you are not only noble but manly. I think it’s all part of the obvious wartime propaganda, [...] *Yet the movie works for them* [Holland’s students who do not understand the symbolism in the film or the times]. *Why? How?*

Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel – as we have seen so often in our politics. But then, World War II was a ‘good war’, and I hadn’t learned Samuel Johnson’s aphorism

³ Denial was defined by Susan Krauss Whitbourne on the *Psychology Today* blog as “ [...] this the “generic” defense mechanism because it underlies many of the others. When you use denial, you simply refuse to accept the truth or reality of a fact or experience. “No, I’m just a social smoker,” is a good example; similarly people can apply this to any bad habit they wish to distance themselves from including excessive alcohol or substance use, compulsive shopping or gambling, and the like. “Just say no,” in this case means that you protect your self-esteem by failing to acknowledge your own behavior. Denial may also be used by victims of trauma or disasters and may even be a beneficial initial protective response. In the long run, however, denial can prevent you from incorporating unpleasant information about yourself and your life and have potentially destructive consequences.” (Whitbourne 2011)

then, nor had I seen so many postwar elections. And I loved – love- this movie, even while I see it is full of hokum.

The war, the kinds of goodness – I think about those when I think about Casablanca. Alas, I also feel a certain contempt for this movie, its lies and cheating, its (so to speak) self-deception. (24-25)

This puzzling about why he enjoyed the movie as an adolescent, and still does as an adult although in a different manner, makes Holland realize that he only really enjoys the movie when he engages with it superficially, for pleasure. When he thinks about the film analytically, he now recognizes its fallacies. However, there is still something “in” it that draws him to it at an unconscious level, and he wants to explore this idea in his further analysis.

Thus, once Holland has dealt with notions of goodness in relationship with the film, he moves on to explore other avenues. As this dialogue about goodness progresses, it leads Holland to a contemplation of sexuality and fidelity. Free associatively he remembers: “*I was just beginning or maybe I hadn’t yet begun to date*”(26); and the film is rife with sexual tension and undertone. Despite the fact that Ilsa’s body is covered in pure, virginal white, Holland still remembers “*How sexy she [Ilsa] was in the imagination of a fifteen-year old boy.*” (26). Holland wonders if the women in the movie will betray their husbands. Will sensual Ilsa betray “goodness-as-nobility” Laszlo as her animated past with Rick simmers under a very thin crust of civility? Will the Bulgarian wife sleep with Renault in order to get exit visas? “*Will these women cuckold their decent husbands, even if it is to benefit them?*” Then he asks a question of great personal relevance: “*After all, I’m a decent guy – I don’t want to be cuckolded!*” (34) So, Holland understands that his fixation with fidelity and betrayal in the film occurs because it touches on an issue that is intimately important for him personally.

As the free associations continue, Holland’s unconscious is appeased as it learns that Rick will acquire “goodness-as-nobility”, he will not take advantage of the circumstances for his own gain. Rick kills the German officer, gives up the girl, rescues the Bulgarian wife and “sets off into the sunset with Renault to join the allies. Thus he atones for his past moral ambiguity. The film reaches its poignant end with the two forms of goodness joined in Rick’s newly-acquired nobility and patriotism. After all, in “good” movies, decent if not “goodness-as-potency” husbands are not cuckolded by their wives.

In a prior analytical thought sequence, Holland recalls that the psychoanalyst Harvey Greenberg argued that *Casablanca* fed into the “agonies of the oedipus complex⁴” (Holland 2006a: 28) as Rick’s emotional struggles spring from these. When Holland read these suggestions first, he did not agree totally with them. However, as he continues to produce free associative sequences to the notion of Rick leaving behind his “lover” to go off to play hero, he understands how Rick’s regression⁵ from the role of potentially sexually active adult to male comradeship and heroics exemplifies a form of regression that “*must have appealed to this fifteen year old*” and continues to appeal to “*five-year-old, psyche of this man in his seventies*” (33). Watching *Casablanca* offers Holland escapism at a defense mechanism level. This idea offers Holland another explanation for why he enjoys the movie so much. While Holland’s educated mind understands the fallacies of the movie, its ambiguities and clichés, he acknowledges enjoying it, even if it is “*better in the remembering than in the seeing*” (25). However, his associations allow him to understand his reasons for still taking pleasure in it. He enjoys it because, despite its falsities and hypocrisies, it allows him to come to terms with his attitude towards World War II, to gain insight into his perceptions of goodness and dispel his fear of potential betrayal:

I sense four things in my response. First, there is the war and my unmanly relation to it. Then, I see things of goodness, goodness-as-potency and goodness-as-nobility, to both of which I aspire. Third, I sense various falsities and hypocrisies in the film. Fourth and more disquieting, is the question: Will these women cuckold their decent husbands, even if it is to benefit them? After all, I’m a decent guy – I don’t want to be cuckolded! (34)

Moving away from his attraction to Ilsa “Rick atones, - I [Holland] *atone* - for our dangerous victory,” (32). Rick’s atone makes space for Holland’s potential atonement and at the end of the movie Holland is absolved from feelings of doubt and guilt. He brushes away his tears as he rejoices in Rick’s double goodness:

⁴ Holland reads *Casablanca* as representing the Oedipus complex in the following manner: “Around the fourth year of a boy’s life (in our culture, anyway), a boy confronts male-female sexuality, a half-understood desire for mother, hence rivalry with the father. This sexual conflict disrupts the boy’s growing effort simply to ‘be a man’ like his father without reference to woman. The cuckolded adult was once the boy-lover whose mother refused him in favor of his father. As a result, the boy feels both murderous and loving feelings towards his father, as here, Rick is at first willing to at first to deny Laszlo the letters of transit, thereby condemning him to prison, torture or death” (28).

⁵ *The Collins Softback English Dictionary* (1991) offers the following psychological definition of regression: “the adoption by an adult or adolescent of behaviour more appropriate to a child especially as a defence mechanism or to avoid anxiety” (Sinclair 1991: 1265).

Rick's double goodness finally coming to the fore. Yes, yes, people are good after all! What a great feeling! What a triumphant denial! And a denial and an escape that I, when I stop and think, feel ashamed of, as an escape from the war, from a sexual rivalry and from, something in my childhood, other things I can only feel, perhaps know intellectually, but not quite say, I use the film to let myself off the hook (35).

Thus, Holland enjoys the film's ideas and the feelings these generate in him, more than the film itself. He recognizes that the romantic model presented in the film is not realistic, but still it allows him to deal with issues that are important for him in a non-confrontational manner. The ending, in which the physically weaker but noble man is not betrayed by his physically superior wife, soothes his way of being in the world. While his analytical critic's mind rejects the weaknesses of the plot, his unconscious permits him to regress to a sexually safe era of his life, while at the same time understanding his denial.

Thus, this associative analysis allows Holland to understand how an event, occurring at an important formative phase of his life might have affected his development into manhood. Exploring his attitudes towards World War II, he made peace with issues arising from attitudes assumed at the time and transferred to his later life. In this way, the free associative film criticism allows Holland to deal first, with his actual relationship with the war and its projections on his life when he initially watched *Casablanca* and also later when he learned the truth about the war as a young undergraduate. Second, it allows him to explore the theme of notions of goodness as represented in his interpretation of the movie. This leads him to understand his connection with the movie at a deeper level. It also allows him to question areas related to sexuality.

Holland covers more general issues in this review also. At the beginning, he questions why certain films become classics. He referred to the notion that directors or scriptwriters put something into the film that the viewer then takes something out of it. However, he did not consider this a complete answer. At the end of the review, he again returns to the question of why certain films engage audiences irrespective of times and cultures. Having demonstrated free associative to *Casablanca*, Holland proposes that films' popular appeal may be related to the subconscious activation of efficient and functional defense mechanisms that permit viewers to interact with, and even enjoy, stories that analytical minds might reject. Holland proposes that: "The secret of popularity is defenses. My defenses make my enjoyment – my wallowing – possible." (Holland 2006b: 35) Thus, films become popular across audiences because they

facilitate the activation of different defense mechanisms. He thus proposes that films become classics because they allow “millions of different people achieve their millions of different defense patterns”. (idem) Watching movies allow viewers to explore their anxieties about dealing with issues. This activity also exposes viewers to other anxieties (those portrayed by actors) and coping strategies. Free associative film criticism helps viewers to understand these unconscious connections.

As watching *Casablanca* opened up many avenues to Holland, allowing him, not only to come to terms with his actual experience of World War II, but also appearing to help him accept his way of being in the world, I felt his method could be useful to apply and teach. His apparently simple processes implied precise techniques and practises. The process Holland followed seemed to demonstrate a step-by-step aspect in free associative film criticism. Holland’s first free associative string, followed by analytical thought, uncovered the issues that were central in his connection to *Casablanca*: his relationship with World War II and his understanding of notions of goodness. The analysis dealt with this more immediate and perhaps what could be considered as more external issues first. However, as it continued, it entered deeper layers of thought. I examined Holland’s other reviews to see if they followed similar principles. The scope of this work does not permit a complete presentation of all, but the method followed similar lines and I will only refer to points that showed different aspects of the work. I was particularly interested in looking at Holland’s review of *Persona*, a film Holland openly admitted bothered him. I wanted to see if this review would follow similar or different patterns.

As in his review of *Casablanca*, Holland’s very first free association strings are enlightening as to why he connects with *Persona*. When writing rationally about the film, Holland cannot pinpoint why he dislikes it so much. He appreciates it aesthetically, and he recognises that all the major Bergman critics refer to it as one of the most complex and puzzling movies ever made. Free associatively, he writes that he normally loves untangling enigmas hidden in films: “*I have prided myself on my ability to decipher puzzling movies*” (Holland 2006a: 95). However, this film perturbs him and his free associative analysis indicates that this happens because Holland finds no unifying principle in this movie:

What skill I have comes from a driving personal need. For me, things have to make sense in a particular way. [...] I need to solve it [a film being analysed] like a problem, finding some verbal formula that makes it ‘come together rightly’. To do that I need themes,

ideally some one idea that will say why all the different elements are there. Call it a “unifying principle”.

This film won’t come together for me, or I can unify it only barely and with difficulty. (95)

The association reveals to Holland a reason for his discomfort, he cannot enjoy *Persona* because of its lack of central coherence.

Writing about the scene where Alma watches Elisabet cut her foot and the film itself burns, Holland “*feels angry*” because “*the film is not behaving as a film ought to behave*” (101). He also comments that the prologue “bothered” his need to see coherence, but as the film progressed on a more conventional line, he relaxed in viewing it. This unexpected twist returned him to his initial state of discomfort and made him angry. Anyone who has read Holland’s work, even superficially, can see that unifying principles are very important to his literary criticism. The most vivid example of this is his use of Lichtenstein’s unique identity theme to examine free associative writing. In *Literature and the Brain* (2009) Holland identified unique identity theme as one of the foundational features of his literary analysis and defined it as “*identity from the outside [...] the persistent and permanent external personal style* (2009: 216). As, unifying principles are of central importance to Holland’s work, it is easy to understand that their absence would be bothersome.

Once Holland has reached an easily acceptable conclusion for the discomfort watching this movie causes him, he is able to deal with a more difficult and personal issue through his analytical and free associative analysis: his difficulty at being a writer (though he has written two works of fiction) and his comfort as a scholar and critic. Holland suggests analytically:

I think I can state the patterns of Bergman’s mind this way, ‘I want to be close to someone (ultimately a mother or my mother). But if I reach her and get close, she will humiliate and hurt me. I read this film as about being close to a mother, a film director, mothering his actresses. [...] Bergman gets to be both the good caregiver, the director mothering and loving his actresses, and the bad caregiver, humiliating the characters he has created.

Bergman, I think, was able all on his own to use his early feelings and to understand his state of mind as he makes a film. That is his gift as an artist. I don’t think Bergman achieved his insights (or this film) out of any personal experience of psychoanalytical regression or even reading about it.

[...] Bergman looked into himself, where he found this primal psyche, and he was able – miraculously – to sublimate it into one of the greatest movies ever made. This was his genius. (2006:110-11)

This analytical thinking leads Holland into a new free associative string that not only proposes sources for Bergman’s genius, but also allows him to see why he cannot operate in the same way. Picking up on this free associative string, analytically, Holland digests this idea and realizes that he does not have Bergman’s “laxity” of repression and therefore would not be comfortable following the kind of issues Bergman pursues in his films:

I think this film, undeniably a masterpiece, simply came out of Bergman’s own psyche, the same ability to access his own childhood [...] Freud said that artists have [...] a special “laxity” of repression. Using that “laxity”, Bergman looked into himself, where he found his primal psyche, and he was able – miraculously – to sublimate it into one of the greatest movies ever made. This was his genius - *and my frustration. He could regress, I cannot. That is my problem seeing this film: I don’t want to regress into the sexuality and loss of self that Bergman portrays here. I can’t enjoy Persona because when I see it, I have to face my own limitations as a human being.* I have to face why I am a critic and not an artist. (2006a: 111).

Free associatively Holland then concludes that he is better prepared to be a critic than an artist/writer because he could not enjoy, or even endure the type of regression that Bergman’s work requires.

Holland’s psychoanalytical reading of why Bergman can regress so easily may or may not be accurate. In fact, as is the case with his analysis of *Casablanca*, the accuracy of the interpretation is not the most important point. What is important is the fact that the explanations obtained allow Holland to investigate and make peace with relevant issues in a non-condemnatory fashion. Through, this analysis of *Poersona* he gains insight as to why he is comfortable being a scholar and critic rather than an artist. This is the most important aspect of this kind of film analysis.

This line of logic is in keeping with Howard Gardner’s proposals on theory of mind presented in *Changing Minds* (2004). Gardner proposes that making sense of our world and surroundings is “a deep human motivator.” (Gardner, 2004: 54) Some theories formed in childhood and through education afterwards may be correct, others charming but inaccurate, still others simply incorrect because, “making sense [of something] is not the same as being correct” (54). However, despite the possible disparity between making sense of the world and creating an accurate world view, Gardner still claims that people are driven to make sense of the world that surrounds them, within the context of their cultural and personal background, because this is vital

to human contentment. This notion is directly reflected in Holland's associative string about why he finds *Persona* so difficult to deal with emotionally as above mentioned.

In *Literature and the Brain*, Holland proposed that we can not enjoy a work of fiction if the external narrative conflicts with inner defences as these operate to return the individual to a state of harmony with his/her unique identity theme. Therefore, Holland cannot enjoy *Persona* because its external narrative conflicts with his inner defences, which tend to avoid regression. The question, "Why am I a critic and not an artist?" arises again in Holland's analysis of *Shakespeare in Love*. Following pleasurable associations, Holland reaches conclusions, in keeping with those above, about why he is better as a critic than as a writer. He embraces the scope of activity available to good literary critics and defends his work and its potential quite fully:

This is why I love this unbelievable film so, this film that dramatizes a sexual and creative freedom I have given up or could never have had. Because I'm safe. Because I've had and I'm having a good life, as good as it gets. I can take pleasure, at long last, in there being a Will Shakespeare without my having to be that Will Shakespeare.

[...] *Watching Shakespeare in Love, I find some old friends, repression and denial. The year 1593 does not happen in the twenty-first century. I am not Shakespeare nor do I want to be.*

[...] *I talk about my own adolescent ambitions as a creative writer and their coming to nothing ... but why should you give a damn about my youthful aspirations?*

[...] *You can, if you are willing, use these themes, that were psychologically important to me. You can try them out.*

[...] *That is, you can say, Holland says this is a film about inhibitions, sexual inhibitions, writing inhibitions. You can think about your own inhibitions as a writer.*

[...] *I feel sure that, if you think about your inhibitions as you think about Shakespeare in Love, you will open up a more complicated, a more exciting experience of the film. I will then have done my work, less grand than the writers', but work that works for me, my work as a critic. I will have accepted that I am not Shakespeare nor was meant to be.* (Holland 2006a: 154-5)

In the analyses of both *Persona* and *Shakespeare in Love* the depth of the writing is similar, as is the significance of the outcomes - despite the fact that one was written in response to a frivolous if enjoyable piece of entertainment, while the other involves what is often classified as a maestro's masterpiece. In addition, the results did not depend on Holland's emotional reaction to the movies: he enjoyed one but found the other deeply disturbing. Reading Holland's associations, it became abundantly clear that

the quality of the association depends solely on the connection between viewer and film. Therefore, analysing films we enjoy can help us evaluate difficult personal issues as much as working with films that bother us.

Holland partially explains why a romantic comedy can affect him as significantly as an intricate psychological drama *Shakespeare in Love*:

That's comedy for you. It lets us be easy on ourselves. In my thinking, when we see a tragedy, we break down a defense. We feel anxiety and uneasy. When we see a comedy, we begin by breaking down a defense – penetrating – but we end by building one up or restoring one. We feel secure again. (2006a: 154)

Because, at least on initial contact, comedies are not challenging, they may permit the in-depth analysis of complex issues.

Holland calls movies the “guardians of his truths”; unlike his real friends (and even himself), they do not age, die, or change with the passing years (Holland 2006a: 10). Also, they are not disapproving when he does not follow their advice, or condescending when he does; they do not judge his fears or ambitions; they give him space to be, to learn, to change:

I've tried to create what Martin Buber would have called an I-thou relationship, even though movies are things and not people. Yet they are wonderful things, and they deserve all that we can bring to them - all *I* can bring to them. Meeting these movies yet again, I've met myself.

You can see what I've brought, all the themes, the competitiveness, the fears, the ambitions, those that I have gratified and those I haven't, the fears [...] You may have read between the lines to see how these things entered into my meeting these movies. (2006a: 179)

In contrast to the immutability of movies (his unchanging friends), Holland comments that his attitudes and reactions may not have always remained constant. Therefore, these films act as relevant timeless guardians of his core identity, signalling changes in him if he pays attention to them.

Reading Holland's reviews the interplay between the rational and the unconscious is clearly visible. Generally Holland begins his criticism analytically, then free associates to these thoughts, which in turn stimulate new reflective thought. Constant transfers from one to the other have the advantage of unleashing the whole power of the mind. Delving into his unconscious by free association, he opens up the film's psychological possibilities for the general viewing public. Despite the potential

mental and emotional battles that such reading of a film might imply, Holland is not overawed by the task.

Holland makes two suggestions on how readers can use *Meeting Movies*. The first is more technical, inviting readers to use his associations and compare their reactions to the same films. This fits into the notion that watching movies can activate defense mechanisms individually within a certain social context. The second is more open, challenging readers to apply the techniques exhibited in *Meeting Movies* to films that they may choose free associatively. He also suggests that viewers uninitiated in free association and wary of psychoanalysis can simply view the films he has analysed in light of the psychological themes that emerged for him, and see if they react in a similar fashion. He advocates that they use his thinking as a vehicle that will permit them to think about themselves and their own reactions: “If I say why I respond as I do, you may be able to use my response to enlarge your own” (Holland 2006a: 19).

I conclude from Holland’s arguments that the films that meet us are not necessarily the ones we enjoy the most, but they talk into our being and become a “whole body” activity. We may love or hate them, but as they reach deep inside us and we can never be indifferent to them. The notion of “whole body activity,” and the idea that any film analysed free associatively should be highly significant in a personal manner, became very important in choosing the film for my personal free association, as well as in instructing volunteers on how to make their choices.

Reviewing Holland’s analysis of *Casablanca* and his other free associative texts to better understand the nuances of the method, I realized several things. First, that the analytical scrutiny of the film often provided the best place to begin free associative criticism. This point would prove very important in later practical work. Second, that, even though Holland never mentions Lichtenstein’s identity theme, he writes about understanding core identity through free association. This notion and the concept already gleaned from my readings, that each person has a unique way of interacting with the world and can achieve happiness by understanding and accepting this, would prove vital to the application and teaching processes. Third, the process followed a step-by-step fashion, that is, dealt initially with simpler issues and moving onto more complex related matters, was vital and would be very useful when presenting to and following it volunteers. Fourth, increased awareness appeared to permit the author to have greater acceptance of self. In some cases, this form of analysis seemed to allow him to understand and make peace with reactions and life style choices chosen in the

past; in others to set a direction for the future. Fifth, that no free associative or analytical conclusion is treated as irrelevant or silly. Some may be discarded later, but at the time of writing all avenues of thought are of equal importance. Sixth, that though he follows all free associative strings, he does not commit all his reflections to public scrutiny. Though he writes very personally about many subjects, he informs readers that some of the more private free associations were excluded from the publication either because they reveal details about others in his life or too much about his own. The emphasis is on pursuing the ideas, but he shows that this perusal does not have to become common knowledge. Realizing this would also be very relevant for the practical work.

Continuing this list of realizations, seventh, I was surprised that the type of film analysed did not necessarily have a bearing on the subject matter covered. In *Meeting Movies* the analysis of two completely different types of film (*Persona* and *Shakespeare in Love*) led to the examination of the same topics. Thus, the type or “quality” of the film was not the most important issue. Rather the connection between movie and viewer was of greatest relevance. Eighth, notwithstanding what was said the above, I was struck by the courage exhibited by the author in his writing. No subject is taboo. He opens his conscious and unconscious mind to readers on very delicate matters, such as the dealing with rejection, the different forms of manliness as applied to others and himself, and even the possibility of betrayal as seen in the *Casablanca* review.

In each review Holland deals with issues that are significant. Analysing *Freud* he considers conceptualizations of manliness. He explores relationships in *Vertigo*. When reviewing *Persona* and *Shakespeare in Love* he deals with notions of frustrated ambitions and desires, and realizes that his decision to work as a scholar and critic was actually a better life choice for him than if he had opted to be a creative writer or literary author. In his review of *Persona* he also puzzles about why subjects can appeal to his academic mind, yet cause him personal emotional discomfort.

This form of free associative analysis appears to allow him to write about deep issues in a relatively painless manner. In his writing, he faces personal problems and takes time to delve into the deep recesses of his mind. At the end of the process he appears to achieve understanding, absolution and a certain form of peace. His writing encourages the reader to attempt a similar journey which may hopefully produce a comparable outcome. Using this method he works both with favourite films (for example *Casablanca* and movies that bother him tremendously *Persona*). Even so technically, the process does not appear to change. When reviewing *Persona*, similarly

to what happens in his review of *Casablanca*, Holland's very first free association strings are enlightening as to why he connects with *Persona*. So even if the stimulation differs, the method used is the same in both cases.

Free associative film reviews are very different to regular literary criticism. The radical movement between analytical thought and free association strings may appear illogical or irrelevant. In fact, as analytical or artistic texts, they often have little or no significance for the reader. However, they are very pertinent to Holland as a reviewer because they allow him to wander inside his thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions, as well as incidents that have befallen him either in his real life or the imaginarium of his mind. Therefore, this method allows for the deepest and most personal expression of inner thought and feeling and this is the path of analysis Holland encourages his readers to follow.

Reading Holland's reviews I felt at times that Holland himself might never have contemplated these issues in this way if not for the initial footpaths offered by the movie. The neutral space created between the critic and the film allowed him to untangle his thoughts and understand his reactions. From awareness comprehension can grow, and there is potential for reconciliation. The importance of this form of writing is not the intellectual content of the criticism, but the fact that it encourages people to explore the unique space that develops between them and a particular movie, which can remain a private space still. Journeying into this space can bring new understanding; when reactions are analysed in this way we can "find feelings and thoughts within ourselves we would not otherwise have found" (Holland 2006a: 12).

2.2 My application of *Meeting Movies to Elizabethtown*

Following the aforementioned analysis of Holland's work I decided to try his method myself to see if it would work for me, and what benefits (if any) the process would offer. The first thing I had to do was to use free association to select a movie that connected with me. Because I dislike the notions of canons and categorizations of art, I wanted to pick a film that would fit into Holland's "bit of fluff" category. Thus I began to think of movies that had connected with me simply as a viewer. Billie August's adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1998) immediately came to mind, as did Robert Mulligan's version of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962). Seen at very different times in my life, both of those films had reached deep inside me. I had not seen either movie for many years, but certain scenes seemed so real and vivid to me that it felt as if I had seen them in the very recent past.

However, I did not want to work with either movie, as my recollections of them were entirely positive. I had been fascinated by Holland's work with films that had bothered him, such as *Persona* and (to a lesser extent) Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Therefore, I thought that it would be interesting to try to find a film that I had connected with both positively and negatively. Also, because of the general orientation of my work, I hoped to work with a lesser-known film, one that might have been classified as a "piece of fluff". I wanted a film that told a simple story with a coherent even if alternative narrative.

This reasoning brought Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown* (2005b) to mind. I had not seen the movie in the cinema because I had considered it just another romantic comedy. However, I watched it after volunteer nine selected it as the film for that moment in her life. I understood her comment that it "allowed her to breathe" because I too felt curiously positive after watching it. It seemed to simplify life as it suggested that problems are part of life, that they have solutions. It also made me laugh. When I watched it again more analytically, I was struck by the fact that I avoided watching the opening scenes: they bothered me. Therefore, *Elizabethtown* fit all the categories I wanted to examine. It was a piece of fluff movie, but it had a coherent if alternative narrative. Also, though I enjoyed the movie as a whole, I reacted very negatively to the opening scenes. This, my free association would allow me to examine both types of reactions. I decided to "meet" *Elizabethtown* to see if I would meet myself.

Following Holland's model, I began by watching the movie again and investigating critics' comments on *Elizabethtown* . As each of Holland's reviews began with relevant technical information and a short summary of critical reviews, I did the same. This led me to conclude that despite *Elizabethtown* 's romantic-comedy label, it introduces alternative approaches to conventional problems. Its humour is often critical of social conventions, and it is very sensitive to mood and nuance. I include quite a detailed plot summary, because the associations are easier to understand if the original plot is laid out in detail. Also *Elizabethtown* was the film that was selected most often for group screening, therefore it is appropriate to present it in a comprehensive fashion.

2.2.1 Technical information, plot summary and overview of reviews of *Elizabethtown*

Technical Information: *Elizabethtown* , 2005, written and directed by Cameron Crowe, produced by Paula Wagner, Tom Cruise and Cameron Crowe, [dvd] running time 119 minutes.

Principal Actors: Orlando Bloom (Drew Baylor), Kirsten Dunst (Claire Colburn).

Supporting Cast: Susan Sarandon (Hollie Baylor - mother), Alec Baldwin (Phil - firing boss), Judy Greer (Heather Baylor - sister), Jessica Biel (Ellen - former girlfriend), Bruce McGill (Bill Banyon - family "friend"), Paul Schneider (Jessie Baylor - cousin), Loudon Wainwright III (Uncle Dale), Tim Devitt (Mitch Baylor - deceased father).

Plot Summary: The movie begins with a scene of corporate disaster – truck loads of rejected products (Spasmatica running shoes) being returned to a factory warehouse – introducing the audience to failure in conventional terms. Then the action cuts to a corporate helicopter and zooms into its sole passenger, Drew Baylor, whose thoughts inform us that he is the person responsible for the failure (which he defines as a "fiasco"). Arriving at "Mercury Worldwide Shoes" (MWS) Drew is quickly stripped of access to the golden kingdom, as his, soon to be, former girlfriend, Ellen, takes his company ID access card. Shunned by corporate friends, he is quickly whisked along the opulent yet sterile company corridors to be tormented by his boss, Phil DeVoss. According to some critics Phil is modelled on Nike CEO Phil Knight (Schwarzbaum 2005).

Phil, Drew's one-time mentor and pseudo-father-figure, not only fires his protégée, but he forces Drew to take total responsibility for the fiasco in an interview for

an article to be published in a business magazine the following week. Leaving MWS (with security guards close by, ready to act if Drew starts to make a scene), Drew sees Ellen crown his successor with a new company ID card as she evades contact with Drew, and he thinks “And in that I knew. Success – *success* – not greatness, ... was the only god the entire world served.” (Crowe 2005a: 16) Drew goes home to his sterile apartment and gets rid of all the fancy clothes and gadgets he has accumulated over the previous eight years. Then he plans to enact an artistic suicide on his state-of-the-art exercise bike that he fits with a large sharp kitchen knife. He fails on the first attempt, but undeterred he re-sets the bike. However, before he can kill himself, real life steps in. His sister Heather telephones him to inform him of their father’s unexpected death while visiting family in Elizabethtown, his Kentucky hometown. Drew must bring his ashes home. So he puts his suicide plan on hold.

On the night flight to Kentucky, Drew meets chirpy, cheerful flight attendant Claire Colburn (Kristen Durst). He is left with no alternative but to enter into conversation with her as he is the only passenger on the flight, and she is an incurable talker – a typical “dumb blond”. Claire is a travel buff and lover of road trips. She draws him a detailed map to get to Elizabethtown, and as Drew leaves the plane she gives him a hotel voucher to which she adds her phone number.

Drew sets off to find Elizabethtown. After losing his way several times, he finally manages to get there. His trip to and arrival at Elizabethtown mark a huge shift from cold corporate scenes to rural life imbued with southern hospitality. The whole town knows of his expected arrival; kids on bikes point out the way to the chapel as he drives through the town. There he meets members of his father’s warm extended family; when they show him a side of his father he does not recognise. Drew comes to realise that they knew his father better than he did. The meeting is upbeat, a celebration of Mitch’s life rather than grieving at his death. Later that night, trapped in the “voucher” hotel (which has been completely taken over by a wedding party), Drew calls Claire and they talk all night. During this conversation they discover that they are soul-mates. They do not have a prior relationship of any kind, so they speak openly to each other about their lives, desires and frustrations. Both confess that they often feel they are living shadow lives, trying to deceive those who live and work with them into thinking they know what they are doing.

Over the next few days Drew gets on very well with his “new” family, and he and Claire spend quite a lot of time together. Drew tells Claire that he and his father

always planned to go on a road trip, but Drew never had time. When Claire is stood up yet again by her absentee boyfriend, Drew drops one of his masks and confronts Claire about her expectations from relationships. He states that she settles for long distance relationships because she is not willing to risk (or does not feel she is worth) true love, and affirms that she should have someone to love her truly and forever. Both a little inebriated, they do what everyone has been expecting – kiss passionately, go back to his hotel room, order room service and the next scene shows Claire getting dressed the next morning in Drew’s hotel room, while he sleeps deeply.

After this, the story line deviates from the formulaic. In a conventional romantic comedy, Drew would now move on with his life and focus on his relationship with Claire, but he doesn't. Instead, he picks up his mask again. When he wakes up to find Claire gone, he rushes out to talk to her, not to tell her he has feelings for her, but to inform her that he cannot have a relationship with her because he intends to end his life as soon as he gets home with his father's ashes before everyone discovers he is a failure. After acting spontaneously and genuinely the previous night, he is back at his role-playing. He has done the failed executive and supportive son; now he is the tragic romantic hero. However, Claire is smarter than she first appeared to be, and is having none of this. Seeing through his charade, she confronts him with the fact that the reason why they cannot have a relationship is his total self-absorption, which makes him oblivious to the effect of his actions on others. She challenges him to accept his failure: as an artist he is supposed to push the boundaries, so instead of wallowing in self-pity or killing himself, he should choose to live.

This pivotal scene changes the direction of the plot (if you could say that *Elizabethtown* has a plot). Life again interrupts Drew’s charade. Claire makes him realise that he has been playing not only with his life, but also - and worse - with the lives and emotions of those he claims to care about. Claire walks away from Drew without a backward glance, telling him maybe she will go to the memorial service to say goodbye to Mitch; he is speechless. He has been so busy playing roles that he has not really been living or constructing a life with others. Claire’s outburst makes him realise that his behaviour is no longer appropriate. It is a calmer, more generous and genuine Drew who meets his mother and sister when they arrive for Mitch’s memorial service.

The memorial service is the ultimate deviation from any main plot line. It meanders through tributes and recognition of errors, and literally ends in smoke. It celebrates Mitch’s life, recognizing that relationships, though rarely prioritized, are

what are really important in life. Claire appears and gives Drew an unusual gift - a detailed map with which he and his father can finally take that promised road trip, and she proposes that Drew drive home with Mitch's ashes. The map comes complete with a series of music CDs and mandatory places of interest to visit along the way.

The road trip is the most poignant part of the whole film. Over time, as he drives from state to state, Drew sheds the many roles he has played and gets in touch with his true core. He mourns the relationship he never had with his father because of the lives they both chose to live. As he grieves his losses (including reading the defamatory business article) a real desire to live grows inside him. The trip confirms the new person born because of Claire's confrontation, and banishes the stereotypes that have previously limited Drew's expectations.

The film ends halfway through the trip. Claire has included a stop at the “Second Largest Farmer’s Market in the World” where Drew can meet her if he wishes. Their joyful reunion is surrounded by light, colour, people and life, very different to the opening sterile corporate scenes. Drew ends the film as a corporate failure, but he acquired a new focus on life, and a vibrant desire to live it. The change would have been complete even if he had not met Claire again.

A brief overview of reviews on *Elizabethtown* and reflections on its inspiration
 Elizabethtown was categorised as a comedy, a romantic comedy and even a drama by critics. The story is told against the background of a soulful country/soft rock sound track. Briefly, it can be described as a film that reflects on the value of solid relationships and on living rather than existing. It has an unconventional narrative development and in the Introduction to the published scripts, Cameron Crowe described *Elizabethtown* as a film that “begins with an ending and ends with a beginning”. (Crowe 2005a: vii) It also champions the notion that success and failure are relative rather than absolute concepts, and explores the idea “that sadness and disappointment is often a deeper personal victory in disguise” (idem).

Initially, *Elizabethtown* received a wave of negative criticism when it was presented at film festivals⁶. The first version was longer and had a more conventional happy ending - the *Spasmatoca* became a commercial success. This version was accused

⁶ These first critiques were based on the version Crowe showed at the Toronto and Venice Film Festivals in 2005. At this stage Crowe was still working on the film and wanted to take advantage of the reaction of the larger, more qualified audiences who attend these events to make his final cuts. According to Roger Ebert in the *Chicago Sun Times* , Crowe specifically asked critics not to review the film based on this screening because it was still a “work in progress”. (Ebert 2005) However, some disregarded Crowe’s request and literally skewered the first version of the film.

of being plot-less, slow-moving and mediocre by Ryan Ellis in “Elizabethtown Review” (2006). Ellis also accused Orlando Bloom of being dull and soulless in the male lead. These criticisms may be seen reflected in some other viewer and critic reviews. However, the Metacritic website awarded the final version a 5.4/10 user score based on 98 individual viewers’ comments and an overall 45/100 score based on 37 officially published press reviews. Significantly, despite the fact that the reviews’ average is below 50% there were no really low scores. The lowest was 38/100, the highest 91/100. Also many of the reviewers who gave a relatively low score like Carina Chocano, who gave it a 50/100 score, actually enjoyed the movie as can be seen below. Most of the reviews placed *Elizabethtown* between 40 and 60 on the scoring scale with some notable exceptions including Robert Ebert’s 75/100 score in his review for the *Chicago Sun Times*.

Although *Elizabethtown* did not open to critical acclaim, it gained a certain popularity. In her review “In ‘Elizabethtown’” (2005), Los Angeles Times staff writer Carina Chocano explained that she enjoyed the movie’s mood of introspection and wrote about the way it subtly highlights trends in society that Crowe sees as being potentially destructive:

Despite his own success, Crowe seems unusually drawn to big-scale failure both as a subject and a mind-altering experience. You get the feeling that success-worship bugs him, because it inhibits people and makes them cowardly and conformist [...] it’s the opposite of the quick commute of the average commercial movie. It’s a meandering road trip instead. (Chocano 2005)

Chocano liked the way *Elizabethtown* did not conform to commercial film making rules. She enjoyed its ability to spontaneously and unexpectedly provoke nostalgia and laughter, and appreciated Crowe’s determination to follow his own conventions when making movies.

In his review “A Brilliant Mistake *Elizabethtown*” (2005) Dustin Rowles also considered the film worth watching. In his opinion, despite all its failings, at times it manages to catapult you into what he considers to be Cameron Crowe’s magically melancholy world (Rowles 2005). Robert Ebert was one of these critics who had not liked the original version but found the final format quite enjoyable. He wrote in “Elizabethtown”, that he felt the shorter version was much better, describing it as sweet and good-hearted with some real laughs. (Ebert 2005) The original ending was not even

included in the additional scene section of the DVD indicating Crowe's preference for the “new” ending.

In the introduction of the published script of *Elizabethtown* Crowe admitted that telling this story had been an extremely personal and often emotional endeavor. During the summer of 2002, after the release of *Vanilla Sky* , Crowe joined his then-wife, Nancy Wilson, and her band Heart on their U.S. tour. While driving through Kentucky, he was struck by the beauty of the landscape. He had last seen those skies in 1989 when he returned to Kentucky, his father’s family home for a funeral. That year Crowe’s first movie, *Say Anything* (1989), had been slashed by several critics because they considered it simplistic and candy-coated. However, the “fiasco” was redeemed by Siskel and Ebert’s 5-star review. James Crowe was celebrating his son’s turnabout success with family when he died suddenly of a heart attack. Driving through Kentucky in the summer of 2002, Crowe was inspired by the circumstances to re-approach this subject. Leaving the tour, he hired a car and wrote the whole script in a few weeks. (*cf. Crowe: 2005a: vii*) Just as Drew did years later, Cameron Crowe returned to his father’s home to say his final goodbye.

In the “Elizabethtown Production Notes” page published on Crowe’s official web site “The Uncool”, Crowe admits that his father influences not only the theme of the story, but also the style. Even though Crowe had written a short story, “My Father’s Highway”, about his “almost” adult relationship with his father after his father’s death, he never published this. Thus the script of *Elizabethtown* was the first text he wrote for the public that reflected his relationship with his father and a son’s need to come to terms with the untimely and unexpected passing of a parent. *Elizabethtown* , combines Crowe’s desire to write about a character who “exists only for love” with a deeply personal question, how do you say goodbye to someone you’ve barely said hello to?

I always liked the idea of telling a story populated with failure and fiasco but in the middle of it is a person who exists only for love [...]I often write about these characters because they’re heroes to me - they breathe in failure and spit it back out and move on. They believe in carrying on with life and honoring positivity. Besides, the other option is a lot darker and usually not as much fun. (n/a n/d)

While Crowe is careful to establish that *Elizabethtown* is not autobiographical in the same way that *Almost Famous* is concerning his relationship with his mother, one cannot ignore the transference of personal sentiment in the movie. Crowe attempts to say that relationships are important and should be respected and nurtured, and that even

when you make mistakes you can fix them if you really want. The movie is an appeal to be truly alive regardless of circumstances.

2.2.2 Free Association to *Elizabethtown* – A personal experience

I followed Holland's model of reporting and, as such, analytical sequences appear in straight print, while free association sequences appear in italics. When I tried to associate to the film as a whole, I found that I was not able to obtain any concrete results. I remembered that in Holland's association to *Casablanca*, the first point developed laid the foundation for the whole work. Therefore, I decided to try to identify the sequences that were most relevant to me. The first one was easy to pinpoint: I avoided the opening scene because it made me physically uncomfortable. Scenes that gave me happy feelings were harder to identify, however I recognized that I connected very positively with the road trip sequence. This sequence lasts about twenty minutes, but I never tired of watching it; it always left me feeling more hopeful and happier in my own skin. I decided to forget the rest of the film, as well as what I had learned from my background research and free associate to the two opposing sequences mentioned above.

I forced myself to sit down and give my total attention to the initial sequence. This was actually physically and emotionally more difficult than I had anticipated and I literally had to force myself to sit and watch the scenes. The first thing that affected me was the sound of a truck reversing *this actually made me physically queasy – and really the sound was the worst part* and then I saw a closed white truck backing into a loading bay – *still uncomfortable but not so bad*. Why do I feel like this? There is nothing ominous or eerie about this sequence, *but for some reason this sequence makes me feel very uneasy. I want to get up and leave the room*. Then the warehouse workers open the truck, which contains pallets of shrink-wrapped brown cardboard shoeboxes stamped “Recalled”. One of the workers sighs, indicating that this is a regular occurrence, and simply comments, “Welcome back, boys.” The camera pulls back and we see a warehouse full of pallets of returned shoes – *now the queasiness is worse. Why? (cf. Crowe 2005b)*.

I have to stop the film at this point. When I think rationally, my reactions are completely out of proportion. *But letting my mind pick up from the sound of the backing up truck - it returns me to a summer (actually the summer of 2003) and the sound of a*

delivery truck pulling up in front of our house and backing into the garage which is situated under our bedroom window and as I hear the beep beep of the reversing truck, I feel sick to my stomach. Just like I did that summer. At the time my husband had a small distribution business. Things had started to go really well when he received a batch of products that tested well but were in fact faulty. Over the following months, all these products were returned in white delivery trucks first thing in the morning. As these deliveries were made early; while I was on summer holidays I often woke up to the sound of trucks backing into the garage. It became so bad that when I heard a delivery van pull up in front of the warehouse, I would feel physically ill. My reaction to the film sequence about returned products echoed this feeling. I thought I had forgotten about that summer, but it was buried in my unconscious even though I did not dwell on it in my day-to-day life. The free association showed me that rather than dealing with that particular business problem, I had buried my reactions. *It had made me feel so bad that I had refused to think about it. When I heard that sound of the reversing trucks and saw the pallets full of shrink wrapped returned products, I wanted to escape from a feeling of failure – somehow thinking about the returned products told me that I would always be a failure.* But that is not true, because it was not my fault, and we survived the situation.

Armed with the result of my free association, I was able to review my reactions accurately and eliminate residual irrational concerns. The returned products had assumed a personal dimension for me; I had assimilated their failure as a personal inadequacy, but in hindsight I could see that we had overcome the situation. As I did not work in the company, I could have done nothing to prevent the problem; the product failure had no bearing on my character or personality. In fact, that summer could teach me that most happenings, no matter how dramatic they to be appear at the time, can be overcome if you keep a cool head and do not panic.

So why do I have this reaction to the scene? Is it feeding into something deeper in my heart and life, because when I watched it again knowing why it bothered me, *I still feel uncomfortable, though I do not feel so sick to my stomach.* I dwell on that summer and ask myself, “Why do I feel guilty about something I have no control over?” I follow the sequences again – *the sound of the reversing trucks in Elizabethtown, lying in bed, ”why do I feel guilty?” – because it must be my fault.* But how? I didn’t work in the company, I don’t know the first thing about electronic equipment – *but you didn’t prevent the problem – after all you’re the responsible one – you take care of problems,*

you carry the burdens of the world on your shoulders. That makes no sense. I can't carry the burden of the world on my shoulders. So stop doing it!!!! *My goodness what a truth – I'm not responsible for everything. Yet I feel responsible, if something goes wrong, I always think maybe it was my fault, directly or indirectly I should have been able to do something, know something to prevent this situation occurring.* This is irrational and illogical, and I have to stop because people get used to me taking care of things. It's time to stop the blame cycle. When something goes wrong I can think about it logically to see if I am at fault. If I am, fix it; if I'm not, get on with living. *What a relief – let's see if I'll be able to do this.*

My association showed me that I need to be careful of the tendency to assume blame for things that go wrong. On the positive side this tendency has allowed me to grow and adapt over the years; but if I let it get out of proportion it can take all the joy out of my life, *it can make me afraid of trying new things and make me hypercritical, not only of myself but also of others and martyrs are no fun. This could even drive me crazy, if I let it. How did I let this get so far?* Too much work and emphasis on deadlines and goals, too little time to think about other things. Also, it is good to care for others, but like everything else when done in excess it can be stifling.

That is why *I identified with the road trip sequence, and the glorious, pointless, meaningless/meaningful memorial service.* (Even though my initial purpose was not meant to include the funeral scene, the first free association flashed to it.) In fact, if the funeral didn't separate this from the road trip, I would probably consider the memorial and road trip together as one continuous block. Why do I like the memorial scene so much? I have friends who hate it, and I think the reason they feel like this is the same reason why I connect with it – *because the memorial sequences are about living, being in the moment, nothing concrete happens– the characters drift from feeling to feeling, they live in the now trying to understand what has happened and its individual and collective significance – it's the kind of time I need not to go into "productive overdrive" that leads to despair when things go wrong and I can't fix them.* At the memorial Mitch's friends and family talk about him. Holly tells funny stories explaining what life is like without him *and makes peace with his family because they understand she really loved him.* Her tap dance on a Saturday night *–is recognition of a life and silent promises to say I will not forget you and I'll honour your memory in my life, which I promise to live and not let slide away.* In some ways there is no real point to any of this, *but recognition brings the capacity to heal – Holly showed her love, their life*

together and the Kentucky family can grieve and she does not have to do everything on her own.

There's a fire, and a funeral without a body and the film enters its final sequences as Claire sends Drew on his road trip. She gives Drew the most unusual map I have ever seen (*where did she get the time to pull this together in less than 24 hours, and how did she remember all the details? She is either manic or a control freak or both* – ok, you won't have to live with her – just suspend the disbelief). The road trip is a carefully-laid-out window in time that allows Drew to re-evaluate his life and determine how he is going to direct it. *Even though he does not have the girl (yet), one feels that Drew is at last on the right path.* He has no job, no planned future, and a rental car – but as he gives himself time to talk to his dad (whose ashes are strapped in the front seat of the car beside him) he laughs and cries, wallows in the humiliation of the article, talks about failures (his own and his father's), wasted time and opportunities, *and realizes that Claire was right. Failure is part of life – it happens to us all and he decides to live.* The film could end here; ok, he hasn't got the girl, but he's got his life and he is now going to live it, not just "be a designer" – he will be ok.

But why do these sequences – Drew talking to his Dad's ashes, remembering childhood, dancing alone, the road, and music, always the music – make me feel so good? *And I remember the road trips of my own youth, going to summer music festivals, hitchhiking around different countries while working summer jobs. I remember driving all night with complete strangers, the thrill of talking into the night, how alive those conversations were, no hang-ups or concerns.* Looking back, I know things could have gone wrong – but they didn't. *Innocently I believed that we lived in a good world (with some hiccups) and my experience had borne that out. My friends and I often worked long hours, pulled double shifts so we could have the time off we needed to hit the road. We rarely had creature comforts, they cost money we didn't have, but everyone went to the college bar to drink pints of water and someone always had bread for toast. No, I do not see myself hitchhiking around Ireland and England again, but I was happy to do that then and it was fun.* Working, studying, family, children – *somewhere along the way I stopped having the time, the spontaneity and the ease to have at least some unplanned conversations.* This is very bad for me. I need the spontaneous conversations, the feeling of being on a journey, even if this is fit into a different life; I can stop and talk to friends, adapt my lifestyle to allow time to smell the roses.

I don't know how many times I have watched this road trip with its nostalgia, music, pit stops – but most of all its recognition that living life takes time; you do not need to be producing concrete results. I realized that my exaggerated tendency to blame came from being too busy. Introspection may form part of my unique identity theme, and this can be positive; but I must be careful to control excesses.

It actually took me two weeks to do the full association to the initial scene. It seemed that my unconscious had built barriers to keep me out of those dusky recesses where I had buried my fears. It was not easy or comfortable to follow the thought sequences evoked by the film scenes and associations; it required courage and a lot of determination. I was tempted to stop many times, as the path I was following was physically and emotionally difficult. Though consciously I wanted to cease the journey, something besides my research gave me the courage to continue. When I persevered, I was rewarded. However, I knew that I would have to warn my volunteers about the struggles that might lie ahead for them and build mechanisms into the methods used that could help them overcome these.

The second association was easier, though again it did not happen in one stage; I did not see the connection between the memorial and the road trip immediately, although these two different sequences were definitely the most powerful. Another curious thing about free associative criticism is that once I had begun, I wanted to continue. The free association to the memorial and road trip scenes made me eager to pursue other connections, even though I knew that the links were not as personal or as powerful as the initial connections. Nevertheless I felt I could learn more about the film or myself, if I analysed these other scenes free associatively.

For instance, I was attracted by the voice-over saying, “As someone once said - what's the difference between a failure and a fiasco?” after the returned product scene (Crowe, 2005b). *I know instinctively that this film is not about an ordinary failure but about fiasco.* When the camera cuts to the author of this fiasco, Drew Baylor, the image shows Drew wearing a black suit and tie and white shirt against a black background. Normally this type of shot is a “power shot”. However, in this case it is anything but – Drew looks like a frightened puppy. *He does not know how to react to what he is thinking and feeling. He is not distraught or overcome, just simply pathetic.* A face is put to the author of the disaster, and its dimensions are reduced. *In fact I am really a bit irritated by Drew's puppy dog expression, this feeling is extended when I am introduced*

to Phil and his corporation, Mercury Worldwide Shoes – *what a supercilious, superficial metaphor.*

As Drew walks through Mercury Worldwide Shoes' headquarters, he thinks out loud “that a fiasco makes people feel better about themselves [...] happy it was not their fault” (Crowe 2005b) *and I smile wryly.* He is greeted as a pariah. *Now I am no longer annoyed with him, because he is not such a puppy dog – he is not playing a role.* Some look at him with total recoil, others with sheer terror; still others offer a cynical form of sympathy, but even they want to distance themselves from their one-time hero. As Drew is brought towards Phil's inner sanctum, being driven down a long corridor on a golf cart by his soon-to-be former girlfriend Ellen, he remembers Phil's phrases like: “We are not just employees, we are Dionysius of greatness” (Crowe: 2005b). *Will you ever get real – I hope you lose a lot of money – you deserve to lose a lot of money.* The corporate hypocrisy transforms my whole mood so the fiasco loses its quality of real tragedy. Common sense steps in. I realise that in Mercury Worldwide Shoes' universe, losing a very large amount of money is not a tragedy or even a fiasco; it is just money that has been lost and that Phil will make again, no matter what he has to do to achieve this end.

Phil, when we meet him, is the ultimate artful snake-in-the-grass boss. He uses apparent concern for Drew's well-being to saddle him with all the blame for the product failure. *By the time the scene ends, I am truly happy that Phil is going to lose all that money, because you know that he is the type of character that will always come out on top of any situation and if he doesn't who would care anyway.* This part of the film establishes two points for me: *one, losing money, no matter how large a quantity, is rarely a fiasco – it is just losing money. Second, the real tragedy in the film, so far, is not that Drew's Spasmatica is a flop; it is that he has subverted eight years of his life to designing it. Drew has missed out on having a life, because he has been completely seduced by Phil's ideology. In fact, I feel a certain relief at this failure – it might allow Drew to escape from Phil's self-centred hypnotic-like effect.* Analysing this association I realized that though I had not initially identified this sequence as a link, it is one. Following these sequences reinforced my initial conclusions and speak to issues that are important to me. However, I only realized its significance after I had free associated to the first two sequences.

Drew understands that he is being manipulated and humiliated during his meeting with Phil. When he leaves Mercury Worldwide Shoes, thinking aloud, “In that

moment I knew success, not greatness, was the only god that people served” (Crowe, 2005b), I am happy and I feel that Drew understands what has really happened. However, I was mistaken. He has spent too many years being bewitched by Phil's philosophy to shake this off in one afternoon. When he realizes that his failure is not really the money the project will lose, but that he has failed the corporate god of success, Drew goes home to fulfil the role of tragic failed executive by planning and preparing his “designer” suicide. *It is an extreme act and we know that he will not succeed. The whole build up to and preparation of the suicide attempt has a touch of the surreal; something is going to happen to prevent Drew from killing himself – besides everything else, it is just too early in the film for the hero to die – it doesn't feel like Gerry Zucker's Ghost (1990). But he can't stop the momentum of habit patterns. The mind on its own is not enough to change habits that have been instilled over time and practice, something more must happen for the person to intrinsically change the way things are done.*

This idea sparked off another train of thought. One of the constant criticisms of Orlando Bloom in this role was his forced facial expression: *Could Drew's frequent forced expressions be due to the fact that unconsciously, he is aware that the scenes where his character plays a “role” like the failed executive, a slightly artificial mask is required – like a bad actor? In the opening scenes Drew is transferring from the role of boy genius, successful designer according to Phil's standards, to failed executive. The roles add a touch of the farcical.*

The designer suicide is interrupted by a call from his sister, Heather. A real tragedy interrupts the staged suicide attempt – Drew's father is dead. Heather tells him, “You have to go [to Elizabethtown to pick up his father's body], you are the oldest – you are the responsible one” (Crowe, 2005b). *Thank God he answered the call – imagine the family having to deal with the two deaths – how many times do real people have to live with the consequences of loved ones not understanding what's real and what's not – wake up Drew – you are alive – you've got to drop your shadow life/death play and get involved in real life. How many times do people who play with life end up hurting those they say they love – this is selfish. It's good to be responsible when not taken to extremes; but maybe we need to build fun into our lives to allow us to be there for others when they need us to be.*

This scene emphasises one of the themes of *Elizabethtown*. Life interrupts people (mostly Drew) from acting the parts that they think are appropriate/socially

acceptable, and brings perspective back to the plot. The next role Drew begins to play is that of strong dutiful son, ready to support his father's whole family in their grief. He forgets that he is suppose to be the chief mourner and he does not know how to react when the member of the extended family try to comfort him or when he sees his father's body in the coffin. This is silly *or is this about Cameron Crowe's question, "How do you say goodbye to someone you've barely said hello to?"* (Crowe, 2005b)

Later, Drew books into a hotel and calls Claire and they talk all night on the phone. *Their conversation reminds me of the many long direction-less yet meaningful conversations that I (and all adolescents and twenty-somethings) have with friends, acquaintances and even total strangers – they go with the age and the mentality – though Claire and Drew are a little older than most.* But they are still good, meaningful and positive events.

The story follows expected lines until Drew tries to break up with Claire. During the time with the Kentucky family and Claire, we do not see the puppy dog smile a lot, but it returns when he tries to explain to Claire that he can't have a relationship with her because he has to kill himself in a few days. When Claire confronts him for what he is – a self-centred role player – the puppy dog smile disappears. Drew's face shows absolute shock, pure emotion, when he realises that Claire is telling him that they have no relationship because of his selfishness. When she says “and we're not even together,” he answers automatically “I know.” Then he realises what they have said, and that Claire is serious. His face genuinely falls and he manages to stammer, “Wait – we're not?” (Crowe, 2005b) For the first time in the film he realises that he has been playing with life and the people that surround him – this is his watershed moment, the moment where Drew grows up.

At the end, I am a little disappointed that the trip is interrupted by Drew and Claire's emotional reunion *and we leave them before they have time to fall out with each other.* Of course there were no hold-ups, car breakdowns or traffic jams along the way, so Drew arrives just on time at the farmer's market following Claire's brilliantly detailed map. Just a stray thought: *can you imagine living with someone that upbeat and full of energy and plans all the time? Just as well the film finished where it did.* Maybe all is not perfect in *Elizabethtown*, but there's enough good to make it worth watching again and again.

So did I “meet myself” when I “met *Elizabethtown*”? Did my use of Holland's adapted free association technique tap into psychological themes that were relevant to

my understanding of my psyche, as the films Holland reviewed did for him? I can truthfully say it did. Meeting *Elizabethtown* showed me things I had never known consciously, though they had been lurking under the surface. Why had I avoided looking at them before? The analysis and repetition of thinking patterns required by Holland's method made watching and appreciating *Elizabethtown* a much deeper experience, and brought those things to light.

Applying free association to *Elizabethtown* changed me in two ways. Firstly, it helped me overcome a psychological barrier that had been built up by situations in my life and by my way of dealing with the world: it showed me that I had a tendency to blame myself for everything that goes wrong. Secondly, it allowed me to see two things that are important to my psychological wellbeing: I need to make time to enjoy the journey of life, and to be true to myself rather than play a role.

“Meeting” *Elizabethtown* showed me that I had not dealt appropriately with the situation in my husband’s firm; I had felt guilty about something that was not my fault. I realized that taking the blame for things that went wrong was part of what Lichtenstein would classify as my identity theme. In general, this had been a positive characteristic in my life. It had prompted me to learn new things, and to ask whether I had made mistakes and this question often permitted me to rectify them. It also helped me not to expect perfection from others, so it has always been relatively easy for me to make friends and be flexible in a work context.

But this trait had a negative side. When I was in a “good place” psychologically, my reason showed me if I was being excessive, but under pressure I tended to lose this balance. When overworked or under pressure, the fear of doing things wrong, or agonizing over what I had done could paralyze me and make my life a misery. Meeting *Elizabethtown* alerted me to the fact that I could not afford to let my mind go down the blame trail, because it would go from zero to one hundred in seconds.

This realization lifted a huge weight from my shoulders, and I developed a strategy for dealing with situations that did not go well. I would think logically about them to determine whether I had been at fault. If I had, I would take responsibility and try to rectify things, if not, I would also recognize this fact and strive to forget about it. This worked well initially and I shared my findings with a few close friends, who had noticed a difference in my outlook. However, old habits die hard; when I hit another very busy period at work, the previous pattern started to predominate again. Luckily, my friends reminded me about what I had told them and jogged my memory. Once alerted

to the situation, I was able to shift my thinking quickly, returning fluidly to the new way of dealing with situations that went off the mark. After nearly one year of gentle reminding the new thinking pattern became dominant. I should also that my discomfort at watching the opening scene with the backing delivery van disappeared.

The second significant aspect of *Elizabethtown* was its emphasis on the importance of the journey of life. *Elizabethtown's* pace and rhythm were important for me. Its meandering through events that were irrelevant to the main plot helped me to see life as a journey; it is travelling, not achieving a goal, that is of paramount importance. After contemplating the free associations to the all-night telephone call and the road trip, I realized that I had fun, even when working hard on projects, when I concentrated on enjoying what I was doing and expected situations to turn out well. So although I need to make time to smell the roses, I do not have to return to a “hippy” lifestyle; by concentrating on the job in hand and extracting joy from this, I can be happy most of the time. Not everything will work perfectly, but failure is only temporary, especially if we recognise it as part of the living experience.

Eduardo Punset writes in *The Happiness Trip – A Scientific Journey* , (2007): “Our cultural baggage is in generally inversely proportional to our happiness levels” (139). *Elizabethtown* contradicted my Anglo-Saxon goal-oriented upbringing and hectic daily schedule. Watching and reflecting on the film reminded me to snatch moments of sheer pleasure, even if this contradicted upbringing. In *Elizabethtown* , conventional concepts of success and failure are challenged: failure becomes success as conventional wisdom is unlearned. Opposites such as north and south, life and death, success and failure, living and existing, functional and dysfunctional relationships, intertwine throughout the movie.

While I began my free association with two points, exploring these opened up new connections for me: Phil’s conversation with Drew, Drew’s puppy-dog look, the all-night phone conversation and the memorial service. As I pursued these later connections, I had a clear feeling that they would not have opened up to me if I had not done the first two associations. When I look back at the later associations, though they partially fitted into the first associative lines, on closer examination, it can be said that I learned more about the film in the second association, while I had learned more about myself in the first associations. So, as Holland and Schwartz had proposed in *Know Thyself* (2008), one can do free associative analysis to any subject. However, one learns more from subjects that “meet us”.

Another curious thing happened when I applied Holland's free association to my analysis of *Elizabethtown*; I understood his reviews in *Meeting Movies* much better. When I initially read the book I grasped the theory behind the reviews, but did not always understand the direction, nor the true relevance of individual reviews. This changed once I had actually applied the theory myself.

2.3 Teaching free associative analysis

In light of Holland's experience and my own, I saw substantial value in working with free associative film analysis. However, if I were to teach the method, I would have to use a process that could be easily explained and understood. One of my first observations after analyzing *Elizabethtown* free associatively was that researching the film, understanding its background and autobiographical quality made re-viewing it an enriching experience. However, the additional information pushed me towards an intellectual evaluation of the film, which made free associative film analysis harder. Because of my research, when I thought about *Elizabethtown* and let my mind wander freely, I often found myself thinking more about Crowe's reasons for writing the script than about my own for connecting with it. Therefore, I decided in my work with volunteers to leave out the collection of background information.

Moreover, I had observed that Holland's initial reactions to the movies analysed in *Meeting Movies* were fundamental in unravelling his associations. Therefore, I thought it might be helpful to ask volunteers to write a little about their personal reasons for picking the particular movie they chose before watching it for subsequent free associative analysis. I felt their spontaneous reaction to their memory of the film might be useful. Thus, based on my observations of Holland's work and my own free associative film criticism, I began to develop a method that I considered at the time "a work in progress".

STEP ONE: Act as a facilitator. *Know Thyself* emphasised the importance of a non-hierarchical atmosphere. Professors were facilitators as well as full participants; all members of the group wrote free associatively, following the "train of feeling" inspired in them by a particular poem or piece of prose. I too would adapt the position of facilitator rather than of teacher. However, I decided that I would not write free associatively to the volunteers' films, as Holland and Schwartz had done in their Delphi Seminars; I felt that this could cloud volunteers' work. Instead, I would show them the sections of *Elizabethtown* to which I had associated and explain how I had done it.

STEP TWO: Instruct volunteers on how to select film(s) with which they connected. Initially I thought this might be difficult to explain, but then I remembered how easy it had been for me to pick *Elizabethtown* and the other films that had met me – there was an intuitive knowing and a sharpness in remembering, that made these films quite unique in my memory. When I explained the process to volunteers, and people

who showed interest in the project but had not pursued it beyond this stage, at least one film came immediately to their mind. The selection was generally automatic and intuitive.

STEP THREE: Because volunteers chose films so quickly and easily, I thought it would be interesting for them to write briefly about why they connected with the films, or to their memories of the films. After all, in many ways it could be said that Holland reacted to his memory of *Casablanca*. Initial reactions are normally very important from a psychoanalytical perspective. I considered that the preparatory texts might “prime” volunteers to look for with the movie of their choice. I was mindful that reviewing formal criticism had made it more difficult for me to pursue the free associative process because this led my thoughts away from my own personal connections to the film. I hoped these personal introductory texts would help volunteers concentrate on the connection between individual mind and movie alone.

STEP FOUR: I had decided to watch the films with volunteers to help them select the specific points where the movies “met” them. In my own case, I was able to achieve concrete results only when I free associated with specific points in the film. Doing free associative film analysis to those specific points allowed me to unravel the secrets the film held for me. I was encouraged in this approach by Erich Fromm’s 1955 essay “Remarks on the Problem of Free Association.” In this essay, he wrote about the importance of specificity when using associative techniques. He encouraged conditioning free association to fixed circumstances and concrete stimuli, arguing that asking a specific question like, “What are you thinking right now?” rather than, “How do you feel?”, or querying “What comes into your mind now when you think about your father?” rather than “What do you think about your father?” would yield more profitable associations. Fromm recognised that the more focused questions may be more intense and at times uncomfortable for the patient; however, he believed they would produce more immediate and focused results, as they avoid reiteration of negative “blind-alley” themes. Patient responses to specific questions would reflect immediate emotions and may be very different to those obtained using general questions. Fromm even claimed that conditioned spontaneous association was Freud’s original objective.

Though I was not anticipating a therapeutic approach, in light of Fromm’s arguments, I felt it would be important to get volunteers to associate to specific sequences. Holland and Schwartz demonstrated that their students reflected on specific elements in literary objects, characters, phrases, ideas, as well as whole texts (*cf.*

Holland & Schwartz 2008: 5). I considered that watching the films volunteers selected should be an active function, not merely watching a movie together. In “Literature and the Reader: Affective Stylistics” (1980), Stanley Fish wrote that reader response criticism benefited readers because it slows down the reading process allowing readers to negotiate texts sentence by sentence and phrase by phrase. It also allows them to stop and evaluate what is important for them. Using this method, readers can analyse events that are real, but outside their actual living experience. I wished to use the viewing period to help volunteers initiate a similar process:

Essentially what the method [reader response literary criticism] does is *slow down* the reading experience so that ‘events’ one does not notice in normal time, but which do occur, are brought before our analytical attention. It is as if a slow-motion camera with an automatic stop action effect were recording our linguistic experiences and presenting them to us for viewing. (Fish 1980: 74)

I aspired to use a form of this “automatic stop action” that Fish writes about to register scenes that volunteers connected. In fact, we normally found at least one or two points during the first viewing. Following the instructions used during our viewing together, volunteers often watched their movies again on their own and found other points of convergence.

STEP FIVE: Concrete instruction on how to write associatively. I talk to them about the steps laid out by Holland and Schwartz in *Know Thyself*.

In writing your response, talk about the work as a whole or parts of it (characters, phrases, ideas) that particularly interest you.

Whatever you write about, try to avoid the intellectual, analytical response of the ordinary English class. Try instead for three things: feelings, associations, persons.

Feelings should form the foundation of your written response. Describe them as best you can [...] as precisely and as fully. Analogies will help you and lead you toward associations, that is, ideas, memories, or thoughts that come to mind as you let the literary work ‘float’ in your consciousness. (Holland & Schwartz 2008: 5)

The instructions were simple and clear. Based on my own experience and on Holland’s and Schwartz’s instructions, I felt it particularly important that volunteers were aware that association could refer to different aspects of the film including characters, phrases, ideas and moods transmitted in specific scenes and longer sequences. I instructed volunteers on how I had free associated to specific scenes and emotions/moods in *Elizabethtown*. I showed them the reversing truck scene and explained how my

associations had flown out of this. This I showed snippets of the longer road-trip and explained how I had associated with a mood in scene. When volunteers responded to the general “mood” developed by a film, I thought it would be important to try to describe that mood in words and I reminded them that normally my associations ran out from a single pin-point: a look – Drew’s puppy dog expression; a single sound. I consider watching the movies with volunteers helped them identify specific points of connection with their films and made the free association much more manageable for them.

STEP SIX: Respect privacy. Holland honestly informs his readers that he has not included all his free associative sequences, as some were too private. I would tell my volunteers that if free association brought up very private issues, they did not need to share them with me.

STEP SEVEN: Promote perseverance. Even though they would not have to show me all their writings, I would encourage volunteers to document all the sequences that free association brought to their minds, and pursue them on their own for their private benefit. I would explain that although this might take both courage and perseverance, it would be worthwhile.

STEP EIGHT: Keep in mind what I wanted to achieve. In line with the Delphi method, my goal was individual decomposition of interpretation: enabling volunteers to evaluate the dynamics between the elements of the interpretation they brought to their analysis, and those elements contributed by the film itself. My aim was not to develop “formal” analytical skills, but to help volunteers obtain a deeper self-awareness and a stronger sense of personal identity.

Holland and Schwartz defined the main goal of the original Delphi seminars as “to help one another understand what each one brought to the literature, namely our particular style of experiencing and writing about works we held in common” (Holland & Schwartz 2008: 5). This was the process I wished to follow in the free associative film analysis trials.

2.4 Aida's free associative film analysis

The first volunteer I worked with was Aida (fictitious name). Aida was 23 years old when we started to work together in February 2009. She is a university graduate. Despite considering herself an easygoing person, she knows that she is quite driven when it comes to work; she likes to achieve real results. In terms of personality, I would describe her as witty, intelligent, communicative and quietly confident of her own ability. She has a strong sense of social justice and a desire to make a difference, even if this requires effort.

The project interested her because she loves to read, watch “good” movies and write, she updates her “literary” blog regularly. She was also fascinated by the concept of “a unique identity theme” and by the possibility of finding out more about herself and her motivations. She thought this might help reassure her about some of her life choices. She sometimes wondered why it was relatively “natural” for her to take calculated risks. She hoped it might help her understand why, unlike many of her colleagues, it is difficult for her to remain in employment situations that give her stability but few opportunities for advancement and personal growth. She prefers to embrace challenges that provide her with new and enriching experiences. She does not worry excessively about her future, because she feels that when you work at things you can make them happen. She recognises that this kind of thinking is not really conventional, but she has seen that hard work, openness of spirit and the belief that one can succeed produce results. She finds negativity, defeatism and small-mindedness very difficult to deal with.

She is hard working and intelligent and so she had little difficulty in securing a permanent position in a company operating in her field shortly after leaving college. She comments that while security might interest her in the future, she feels that if she does not try different things when she is young, she never will. She has always seen the first years out of college as an opportunity to gain relevant experience. Therefore, when her first job offered her few opportunities for development and growth, she sought another position that would provide opportunities to broaden her professional base and prepare her for a better future. To date, Aida has had a varied and successful career since graduation, despite difficult economic conditions in Portugal. She has travelled widely through her work and was even based in the Middle East for six months.

Sometimes, she has problems relating to her friends' choices. They complain about low wages and limited prospects, but refuse to do anything to change their situations. She tried to help them because she remembers how difficult it was to leave her first secure job; she recognises that it takes courage to make a decision like that, but they appear to prefer to complain than to take action. Sometimes, she says that she would like to feel "more normal" because she feels that she does not belong to her circle of friends. However, she has come to understand that "normal" does not hold many charms. One of the reasons that she wanted to be involved in the project was to see if she could learn more about herself. Although, she likes being the way she is, there are times when she feels isolated and somewhat alienated from the people that surround her.

Calendar of Events

Early March 2009: Aida showed interest in the project. She picked Mini Leder's *Pay It Forward* (2000) as the film she wanted to work with.

23rd March 2009: Aida sent a short essay on her reasons for choosing *Pay it Forward*.

31st March 2009: We watched *Pay It Forward* together, discussed technical aspects of the project and began the process of selecting Aida's connection points.

20th April 2009: Aida sent her associations.

21st April 2009: We met to discuss her writing, and she told me about some of her more personal associations. Aida had worked quickly on the free association project because she knew she would be travelling intensely from May to the end of September and so would not have any free time during this period.

End October 2009: Re-establish contact by email and arranged our next meeting.

4th November 2009: We discussed the implications of the project in her daily life. Aida agreed to start a free associative diary for the months of November and December.

6th January 2010: Aida presented her free associative diary and we discussed it.

January-June 2010: We maintained email contact, exchanging ideas.

22nd July 2010: Aida returned feedback questionnaire.

23rd August 2010: Online conversation to discuss project and feedback.

17th May 2011: Final follow-up conversation.

In early March 2009, I explained the free association process to Aida and demonstrated how I had chosen *Elizabethtown*. She decided that she wanted to work with Mini Leder's *Pay It Forward*. This surprised me initially since, as Aida read widely and watched all kinds of films, I had expected a different type of film. Then I remembered my own choice of *Elizabethtown* and how my associative reactions had helped me. This reminded me that a film does not have to be a classic to have a positive impact on people's lives.

Although, I did not ask Aida to do a review of the film, I will begin this section with a short technical overview because Holland always did this in his presentations. Also, I think that it is relevant that there is some mention of the critical reaction to the movie as Aida's analysis will make no reference to critic's reviews as she was not familiar with these. However, as *Pay It Forward* will only be used for this review, and because of the nature of the associative work, this section is much shorter than that produced for *Elizabethtown* and *Dirty Dancing*.

Technical information and plot summary of *Pay It Forward*

Pay It Forward, 2000, directed by Mini Leder. Based on the book *Pay It Forward* by Catherine Ryan Hyde, screenplay by Leslie Dixon.

Produced by: Peter Abrams, Robert L. Levy, and Steven Reuther.

Running time [dvd]: 123 minutes.

Principle Actors: Kevin Spacey (Eugene Simonet), Helen Hunt (Arlene McKinney) and Haley Joel Osment (Trevor McKinney).

Supporting Cast: Jay Mohr (Chris Chandler), James Caviezel (Jerry), Angie Dickenson (Grace), Jon Bon Jovi (Ricky McKinney).

Plot summary: The movie begins when journalist Chris Chandler is introduced to the "pay it forward" concept; the journalist's frustration at seeing his car demolished is turned into amazement when a total stranger gives him the keys to his Jaguar. When the hardened journalist asks where to return the car, he receives another surprise. The stranger tells him that he simply needs to do three significant favours for strangers and ask them to do the same. In this way Chandler will pay the favour forward, as his unknown benefactor has just done. Chandler has to find out how this pyramid of good began and his investigation leads him to 11-year old Trevor McKinney.

Trevor McKinney, his dreams and his relationships are at the heart of the story. Trevor desires to live by his own rules – despite his broken home, flawed parents and tough Las Vegas school, where nothing much is expected of the students. Social science teacher Eugene Simonet (himself damaged, and aware of the reality of his students’ circumstances) sets his class a very unusual assignment. He begins his first lesson telling them that he knows as school and society in general does not expect very much from them. Still he challenges his students to develop a project that could change the world.” “Pay it Forward” was born out of Trevor’s eighth-grade social science class project and is an expression of his desire not only to survive, but to be truly alive in a hostile environment. Towards the end of the movie, Chandler finds Trevor and interviews him for nationwide TV. As this charming 11-year old explains his idea, viewers are induced to believe that fairytales are possible. Unfortunately, there is no happy ending; after the interview Trevor is stabbed to death defending a friend in the schoolyard. The movie ends with a vigil outside his home, as his friends and those who learned of his hopes stand in silent homage to a fallen hero.

The reviewers generally applauded Spacey, Hunt and Osment for their acting however the movie itself received mixed reviews. Apparently, it was more popular among the viewing public than the critics because according to the “Pay It Forward” IMDb web page (n/a n/d), 56,045 users gave it a rating of 6.9 out of 10, but it got a 40/100 average score from the 642 critic reviewers. An example of the mixed reaction can be seen in the reviews below. In his review “Pay It Forward” on the *BBC Film Reviews* web page (2001), Michael Thomson gave the film a four-star rating, classifying it as a sentimental and emotionally convincing story about decency and change. (Thomson 2001) The authors of “Pay It Forward Review” on the Talktalk web site were not so kind. They gave *Pay it Forward* an overall classification of four out of ten and denounced the movie as being absurdly melancholic and lacking in subtlety (n/a n/d). However, Aida was not alone in being moved by *Pay It Forward* and many viewers were touched by watching the movie⁷. While *Pay It Forward* may not be considered a

⁷ Goldstalk, a mother who had lost her son in a car accident, offers one of the most poignant examples in her review “From a Mother Who Lost Her Son” posted on the IMDb review site:

i cried like never before, and i have cried A LOT in the past 5 years! this was a really different cry, though, because i think it was a cleansing cry - i cried for myself and for everyone who has lost a child - the terrible ALONENESS and hopelessness, and the desperate search to make something "good" come out of it; to fill that void/emptiness where part of our own future was ruthlessly taken from you. [...] it will be 5 years, on Aug. 21, since i lost my 19 year old son in a car accident.

classic or a great work of art, it spoke to some viewers profoundly. It spoke to Aida being for that reason a valid choice for her free associative analysis.

Aida's Associations I asked Aida to write about why she had picked this film before we watched it together. She watched it again on her own in order to do this as she said she wanted it to be fresh in her mind to write appropriately. I received the text presented below on 23rd March 2009. This is the English translation of the text Aida sent. I maintained the tone and use of type face that she used in her original text:

“Pay it Forward” may not be the movie of my life (the choice is difficult!), but it is certainly a movie that marked me because of the message it conveys.

In the first lesson of 7th grade Social Studies class, the teacher Eugene Simonet (played by Kevin Spacey), sets his students on a mission: they have to prepare an annual project in which they have to think of an idea to change the world and put it into practice – “Think of an idea to change our world - and put it into action!”

As part of this project, one of his students, Trevor McKinney (Haley Joel Osment) initiates a network of favours: help three people who, in turn, agree to help three people respectively and so on. In this way, Trevor hopes to establish a favours' system which could become massive over time. The peculiarity of Trevor's idea was that the task would have to be something difficult to do, not difficult in the sense of being nearly impossible, but in the sense that it put the person to the test. "It must be something big," says Trevor McKinney. The entire film unfolds from this idea.

In an ever more globalized world, where individualism has gradually been replacing the idea of community and growing self-centeredness has engulfed ethical values, the film reminds us of how we are all interconnected (more than we think!). [It questions] how individuals exist and are constructed through their relationships with others and therefore indicates that they have a responsibility to others. As the Dalai Lama wrote in his book (2001) *Ethics for the New Millennium*, "... actions have a universal dimension and we must find ways to develop a natural empathy in them so that we will have a sense of responsibility towards others."

Another point to remember is that by helping someone, we are not only changing and having an impact on someone else's life, but also on ourselves. Hence the difficulty. Helping others often involves dealing with values such as forgiveness, altruism, faith, patience, tolerance and humility. It interferes with our identity, implies change. Also the film reminds us that every day, we only have two options: moving forward or quitting. It's easier and more comfortable to allow ourselves to get used to a status quo, than trying to change and pursue happiness (ours and others) even if we are not satisfied with the situation. As Trevor says, many people give up and when they do ... everybody loses. It's really a film that makes us think about what we can do to try to change the world. (Ap: 8)

[...] i really like this movie - it is filled with hope and tenderness and love for one another - the good that will come out of the bad will reach great heights! (Goldstark 2006)

I looked closely at Aida's introductory comments because, as I had seen in Holland's case and my own, they reveal much about why a particular film is important for a specific viewer. Aida starts her text with: "*Pay it Forward* [...] is certainly a movie that marked me because of the message it conveys." In this short introduction, Aida identifies the message as the most important element in the movie. Aida's second paragraph indicates her interpretation of the message - anyone, even a 7th grader, can produce an idea that has the ability to change things for the better. Perhaps because this seems like a ridiculous proposal, she moves from her personal interaction with the film to global issues, supporting her ideas by quoting from an external source: a book written by the Dalai Lama, a world leader recognized for unworldly aspiration, strong moral convictions, and a desire to generate change through peaceful means. This shift leads her to an abstract discussion about the concept of change and helping others. Then she returns to her personal interaction with the film, which reminds her that we have a choice every day to try to help ourselves and others and that if we maintain this type of effort everything is possible.

Although she ends this section by quoting Trevor when he comments that many people give up, she finishes her review by returning to the message of the film: "It's really a film that makes us think about what we can do to try to change the world." Here again she switches from the personal to the global. This text demonstrates a pattern, first there is the personal contact; this is then validated by an appropriate literary reference, which in turns leads to a reflection on the global. The text ends by returning to the personal but introducing a global perspective. As I reread the text, I wondered if Aida needed literary references to validate things that she inherently felt to be true, but that contradicted contemporary opinion. As our work progressed the message always came to the fore, above characters and acting, I wondered if its importance to Aida let her disregard incongruous elements in the story.

31st March 2009: I met with Aida and explained how free association worked. I showed her the introduction and clips from the road trip in *Elizabethtown*, explaining how I had initially felt about them and how I had free associated by thinking specifically about those scenes and letting my mind go where it wanted.

I also showed her how free associative work can help enjoy the film more. I showed her some of Drew's "puppy dog face" scenes, explaining that they had annoyed

me when I first watched the film, but that this changed when I noticed that the puppy dog mask drops after Claire confronts Drew. This association had not provided self-knowledge, but it helped me enjoy and understand the film more.

Then we sat down to watch the film together to identify specific connection points for Aida. I was not expecting to locate all the contact points at this time, but wanted to establish a basis for discussion. We viewed the film in an amphitheatre with a good sound system, and I tried to make the atmosphere as relaxed as possible. This was my first time watching someone else reacting to a film. However, it was easier to have indications of connection points than I expected. Just sitting near Aida, I could sense her reacting to certain scenes. She appeared to react strongly to some simple lines: for instance, at one point Arlene, Trevor's mother, asks Jerry, (a homeless man that Trevor brings home as one his pay it forward tasks) "Won't you have a cup of coffee?" Later Jerry uses the same question to intervene when he sees a woman preparing to throw herself off a bridge. In addition, she was obviously moved by the scene where Trevor presents the "pay it forward" concept in class and Mr. Simonet is amazed that a student has taken his idea beyond his conceptualization, making at least this eighth-grader think that he could influence the world.

After the screening, we talked about connection points. I suggested "the cup of coffee" line and she agreed with this. She suggested the concept of "pay it forward," as well as a poignant scene where Mr. Simonet tells Arlene, he cannot forgive her. Aida said she would watch the movie again at home, to confirm that these were her connection points and add others she felt relevant.

We also discussed the ending of the movie. I felt it was out of sync with the rest of the story. Aida disagreed because she felt it appropriate, even if it robs viewers of the happy ending they have been induced to expect. She described Trevor's death as powerful provoking greater impact on viewers. Remembering Holland's proposals that, individuals' defenses can them to misinterpret texts, I asked Aida to think about this when she did her free associations.

She agreed to document her associations within two weeks, while the experience was fresh in her mind. I translated the text from Portuguese, and as most of it follows free associative analysis, it will be presented in *italic print* as Holland had done. However, Aida used italics in her text. From this point forward, for clarity of presentation and interpretation, I transposed all texts written in italics in volunteers' original versions into straight text. The text Aida sent on 20th April follows:

Through the film *Pay it Forward* we can look at several issues concerning interpersonal relations and human behaviour.

The first question brings us to interdependence. Can my "I" be isolated from the "other"? The film shows us that we are all interconnected and that our simplest daily attitudes and/or behaviours can have an impact on others and make a difference. An example of this in the film is when Trevor's mother, Arlene is talking to Jerry, the homeless man played by James Caviezel-, [after she realises that he is in her garage and actually trying to fix her truck, not steal it, because Trevor helped him and invited him to stay. Jerry is only trying to pay the favour forward] and asks "Would you like a cup of coffee?" Just by expressing a simple sentence, she showed that she cared. That she was not indifferent to Jerry in a world where a homeless, drug addict usually only receives disdain from others. Later Jerry will try to convey this feeling to the woman who is attempting to commit suicide on the bridge. He says to her: "Have a cup of coffee with me?" Then he adds: "Do me a favour, save my life." This last sentence brings us to another question:

When we help someone, are we only causing a change in that other person or in ourselves also? The film shows that by helping someone, we are not only having an impact on that person's life but also in our own. And this is, in most cases, the first hurdle, since helping another often involves dealing with our identity, our beliefs and values, especially those related to forgiveness, patience, tolerance and humility. You can even speak of a kind of exchange of aid. Hence, in the context of "paying it forward", the favour extended has to be a difficult thing to do. In the film, when Trevor asks Mr. Simonet to give Arlene another chance and Simonet refuses, but promises to continue the favour chain helping someone else, Trevor responds "But this is why it is the one, because it's supposed to be something hard. If you help her even if you're mad". [At her]

Third, and taking into account that paying it forward would only work if all the people who were helped make a pledge to help three more people and this process continued successively. If people who were helped didn't continue the favour, then the "chain of favours" would eventually disappear. As Mr Simonet said, commenting on Trevor's idea: *"It also requires an extreme act of faith in the goodness of people." Certainly this leads us to wonder whether, in a real situation, people would actually be good enough to allow a continuation of the movement. Could it be that Rousseau was right when he said that man is inherently good? The film shows us that there is goodness in everyone, after all if an idea that grew out of an isolated assignment for a Middle School social studies project could spread to such extent that it become a large-scale movement ("the movement" as journalist in film called it).*

Finally, the movie reminds us that we have only two options every day: moving on or quitting. It's easier and more convenient to let ourselves get used to things than trying to change and find happiness even if we are not satisfied. The "familiar" is certainly more comfortable than the "unknown". This idea is essentially developed in Mr. Simonet's character. In one part of the film when talking to Arlene, he says, "My life is familiar, my life is manageable [...] is a routine and as long as I have that I'm OK, if I don't have it I'm lost." This led him to renounce love because he had never known it and was afraid of what could happen.

It was in this last point that I identified because it showed me what I would consider as the standard of success in my life. I'd like to get to the end and know that I had done the things that I liked most, that I had worked in the areas that I liked most, and that I loved and was loved, that I learned, I taught and I did something good. Feeling that I had fought and it had been worthwhile. Maybe it's not a very original idea, basically it is

something we all want. But I think it is not easy. It is difficult to change, it is difficult to move away from what is familiar. Often we are unhappy with what we have but do not have the courage to take risks and look for something that will make us happier. I think this is a large-scale problem: how many people live an unhappy marriage? How many people hate their jobs yet still don't try to find something that suits them more? Of course, things are not so linear- In the first case, for example, we have to see that there are societies where divorce is frowned upon and is not really a choice. In the second case we have to see that there are people who have a family to care for and cannot afford to risk being unemployed. Each case is different but I think that overall change does not happen not for lack of opportunity but because of fear. Fear of failure, fear of what others may think. I also believe that globalization and consequent standardization of tastes and behaviour has made us "forget" the values of individualism. Questions like: "Who am I? What makes me happy? "Were replaced by questions like:" What can I do so that people will think well of me? What is "fashionable"?"

Most of all, those of us who live in a democratic and liberal society should enjoy the freedom of choice [that is theoretically ours]. For centuries many people fought so that we would have freedom today. Especially in the post World War II era, there were many movements: women's rights, flower power, Martin Luther King and his struggle against segregation, to mention but a few and these led to a gradual improvement of civil rights. What better tribute could we pay to all those people who fought for their ideals, so that we would live in a better society today, than to make use of this freedom in our daily lives?

"I do not know ... I think some people are too scared or something ... things can be different and, I mean, the world is not exactly shit. I guess it is hard for some people who are so used to things the way they are, even if they're bad, to change and they kinda give up. And when they do, "everybody kinda loses. "(Trevor)

Finally, I was thinking about the question that Cecilia asked me [before we watched the film together] - why I did not mention Trevor's death [in the first text], it is arguably one of the strongest moments of the film. It's not that I overlooked this part because every time I saw the movie I cried. *But death is the only right end, and I think the end is not so important in itself, but rather the journey: the people we get to know, what we learn, we teach and the things for which we fight. And I think Trevor's trip was worth it. For him and for everyone (Ap: 9-11)*

On 21st April 2009, I met with Aida to discuss her free associative film criticism. Aida introduced her text by writing about interpersonal relationships, and then expanded this by asking, "Can my 'I' be isolated from the 'other'?" Then she reflected on the cup of coffee scene, indicating that a simple daily attitude can have an impact on others and make a difference. I was really interested to know more about her connection with the "cup of coffee" scene; while we were watching the film, I felt that Aida appeared to connect with it strongly and positively at a physical level. She settled comfortably in her chair when watching it; when Jim repeated the phrase later in the film, she responded to it again. Curiously, this kind of comfortable physical reaction occurred in later trials when other volunteers connected positively with scenes.

She said that in many ways, when she thought about this scene/phrase she realized that it influenced her in two ways. First, at an intellectual level, when she thought about it within the context of the film, she realized that it has a double humanizing effect. It allows Arlene to redeem herself by showing that she considers Jerry like any other welcome visitor whom she would offer coffee to. It also shows Jerry her acceptance and speaks to his inclusion in society. Second, she also had a very personal connection. The cup of coffee scene had produced an associative flash when she concentrated on it. It brought her back to her childhood. Though she had been brought up in the city, her father had been raised on a small farm which her grandparents still ran during her childhood. Her family visited the farm at weekends, and the scene brought her back to those visits.

These were normally “working” visits where her parents talked about “adult things” with her grandparents. Everyone helped with farm tasks and collected fruit and vegetables for Aida’s family to take back to the city, but she and her sister often felt left out. They were not involved in the discussions, and were unable to help with many of the tasks. However, after lunch they would all go to the local café and her grandfather would always ask the girls, “Would you like some ice cream?” This simple gesture made her feel special and included; when they went to the café, they were all together and the girls were at the centre of the conversation. Aida said that her grandfather’s small gesture asking if she and her sister “would like an ice cream” had shown her that little acts can humanize and include the other.

I also wanted to know more about Aida’s reaction to Eugene’s attempt to take refuge in his previous life when Arlene’s ex-husband returns. Aida told me that Eugene’s obvious desperation had helped her understand why people sometimes clutch at patterns that allow them to exist, if not exactly live. It gave her an insight into the difficulty of breaking habits that may not permit a vibrant life but that allow survival. She recognized that Eugene’s habits were born out of extreme trauma and/or frustrated attempts at courage. Watching the film let her empathise with Eugene’s cry for stability, “My life is manageable!” Thinking about this reaction and discussing it brought to mind her friends; previously she had been critical of them because she felt they simply lacked ambition. After this exercise, though she still does not condone inaction, she can understand its causes and feel empathy for those who may be “locked” in unhappy lives. While thinking about the scene brought her understanding of others, it also led her to affirm what she wanted for her own life. These reflections made her thankful for what she has and vindicated her lifestyle choices. She returned to her text, “*since helping*

another often involves dealing with our identity, our beliefs and values, especially those related to forgiveness, patience, tolerance and humility.”

We also discussed the texts that Aida had written about self knowledge and courage to bring about change in her own life. Through these she acknowledges that though change may be difficult, it is necessary. Perhaps part of her identity theme is that, to be happy, she will always have to “push the barriers” a little; the status quo is not for her. The association helped her embrace this facet of her inner character, while allowing her to understand others who may not share the same traits.

Aida’s first reason for selecting this movie had been its message: we can change things around us, but this takes courage, effort and maybe even sacrifice. I consider that what Aida wrote about the ending shows that she values the journey of life more than the final outcome. Trevor’s three pay it forward acts had to be hard; they would require sacrifice. Aida’s acceptance of the ending fits into her pattern of reading not only the film, but life itself. Though she cries at Trevor’s death, she does not really consider it a waste because of what he was able to achieve in his short life.

When we talked about what she felt she had achieved during the work. Aida told me that associative writing reinforced her inherent belief that life is about reaching outside our comfort zones, even when this is hard. Through the associations she saw that quitting started out as simply staying still; but when we think about it no one ever stays still. People are either moving forward through their own effort, or moving backward as their passivity causes them to be negatively affected by the forces that surround them. Doing the association vindicated her decisions and approach to life, and she was very happy and enthusiastic. The association had sparked off a different way of thinking; they made her think that she had been half asleep before, but now she was wide awake. She quoted a famous Portuguese poet, Eugénio de Andrade, to express how she had thought before:

*Passamos pelas coisas sem as ver,
gastos, como animais envelhecidos:
se alguém chama por nós não respondemos,
se alguém nos pede amor não estremecemos,
como frutos de sombra sem sabor,
vamos caindo ao chão, apodrecidos.*

We pass things without seeing them,
used, like aged animals:

if someone calls to us we don't reply,
if someone asks us to love we don't shudder,
as fruit grown in the shadow tasteless,
continually falling to the ground, rotten. (my translation)

As Holland's analysis of *Casablanca* revolved around understanding his relationship to the notions of goodness demonstrated in this film, Aida's seemed to revolve around the understanding why and how she connected with the idea that each individual has the ability to change and effect change. These issues seemed to be very important to her way of interacting with the world, or unique identity theme, because after doing the free associative film criticism, she felt reassured about herself, her identity and her choices. Her free associative film analysis had reassured her that she was not crazy for doing things her own way, and it was alright to be different. In addition, learning the free association process had changed reading for her. Formerly, enjoying books had not added anything concrete to her knowledge of self; now everything she read spoke to her in a different way, and she carried these associations with her.

Following Holland's recommendation, I talked to Aida about the connections she makes with historic figures like Martin Luther King and the Dalai Lama and the fact that they belong to global reference system more than a personal, which might be a drawback in this type of analysis. Aida answered by saying that these characters had gone against conventional wisdom and their moral stances made alternative approaches available. She felt a certain comfort when she looked at lives like theirs. In addition, the film made her ask about interdependence: *Can my "I" be isolated from the "other"?* She said even if she referred to others, she realized that it was she, Aida, not Martin Luther King or the Dalai Lama who must reach out to touch another.

I believe that this conclusion supports Aida's way of being in the world. She likes seeing herself as a potential agent of positive change. The association allowed her to understand this as one of her personality traits. Comments like, *"It is difficult to change, it is difficult to move away from what is familiar,"* show that Aida understands that what she wants to do is challenging, but worthwhile for her. I felt that she had used literary and historic references to support her unusual ideas – initially to herself, and later to others including me.

I was pleased with Aida's work and wondered what to do next. She did not appear to have any psychological barriers, as I had had, but the association assured her

about her lifestyle and choices. She revelled in the concept of unique identity theme and in the notion that she did not have to worry that her choices were different.

Comparing her case to my own, I remembered that I had needed gentle reinforcement from friends to sustain my changed thinking patterns. I wondered how I could unobtrusively provide a similar type of support for Aida, especially as would be entering a very busy period.

I wasn't sure what level of support she needed, as her reaction to the project had been very positive. Her face had glowed when she talked about what she had learned from the free association. She said it had made her feel alive and had helped her recognize and celebrate her life choices. In essence her association had not required her to re-evaluate or change her way of thinking; rather it had validated her choices and way of being in the world. Therefore, considering her upcoming situation, I did not give her any specific tasks, just arranged to meet again in the Autumn when she would have more time.

4th November 2009: We started to communicate again by email at the end of October and met at the beginning of November. At this time Aida had made a very important long-term decision, which she believed would help her prepare for her future. As already mentioned, her job required her to work intensively for six to eight months of the year. In 2009 she had decided to take a six-month leave of absence during the quieter period to begin a master's degree. As she no longer had a regular income, she had started working in a tuition centre to pay the bills and, because she had always been interested in teaching. When we met she was very busy with college and work, but she was happy. She said that she still felt reassurance from the free association; what she had learned had helped her make her current decisions.

I wanted, if possible, to understand how free association had helped her make decisions and influenced her way of looking at issues. Therefore, I asked her to keep a journal of incidents, where she would record specific incidents where she felt the free associative film analysis had influenced her action/approach/attitude. We arranged to meet again at the end of December, when she gave me the diary records below. In general terms I was pleased with the outcome of this exercise. Aida was reassured about her way of being in the world, and she also appeared to be making career decisions that were in line with her identity theme, for instance teaching fitting into a desire to effect

change. Below is the translated version of the diary that Aida kept over the months of November and December 2009:

1. In November I started a new experience in my life. I started to work in a tuition centre as a tutor. What started out as just a means of earning some more money, turned out to be one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. I had always liked the idea of being a teacher and before choosing my professional area I had thought about becoming a teacher⁸ and this experience showed me what that might be like. Second, and following the logic that we build relationships with others, I think that there is no greater challenge than dealing with children / young people. More than being a mere tutor, I ended up making friends with some of them. I think the main lesson I learned was how to adapt to different needs and to be able to find the individuality in each of them. Each one is an individual, with their difficulties, with their different challenges and problems. I try to position myself in a different manner for each of them: use a different approach, a different way of explaining. Funny, I have been working with them for 2 months now and when I am with them, I no longer feel that I am only dealing with a student with difficulties, but rather they have become individuals to me. That is, I no longer just feel the "educational" dimension, but also the personal side of each one. Some of them come from troubled families others live in normal family environments, with sporadic domestic problems, which gives them different characteristics.

2. In late October, I went to my local employment office. While waiting my turn to be attended, I witnessed a scene that made me to think about the way people are dealt with in places like this – [where the person behind the desk is in a position of power over the person they are supposed to be helping]. Sincerely I feel that, unfortunately, incidences like the one I witnessed happen more than they should.

There is a counter in the waiting room (the other posts are out of sight), and anyone who is waiting can hear the conversation between the clerk and the person being attended to. While I was waiting a man who looked like he came from an African country went to the desk. When he began to speak, his Portuguese was almost imperceptible. From what I understood, he was asking if he could receive unemployment benefits, as he had been out of work for some months. After a battery of questions, the clerk said he was not eligible for unemployment benefit, as he had not worked a sufficient number of months to permit this. Then the clerk added that there were other benefits but he re-emphasized to the man that he could not receive unemployment benefit. Frankly, because of the technical nature of the conversation and the man's broken Portuguese, I had the feeling that he had not understood anything, except that the unemployment benefit had been denied. I imagined myself in a foreign country without a job, without mastering the language and without knowing my rights. Then I imagined myself in this situation and with a family to feed. I must confess that after all that I felt like yelling at the clerk. If he had said "you are not entitled to the unemployment benefit but you may be entitled to others, perhaps a rehabilitation allowance." [it would have changed everything] I felt like crying and asking the clerk if he was not ashamed, to put himself in the other's position (in a distant country without a job). [I wanted to] say that in his position, it was truly his duty to help the other. A small gesture, a little more patience and willingness to help might have made a difference. This is a situation that reminds us of the impact we have on others, and once again little words, gestures can make a difference. Then I wondered if I could have done something

⁸ Aida was probably influenced by the fact that when she entered university there were too many qualified secondary school teachers and few prospects at all for young graduates

3. One of the students whom I tutor failed all his tests except one. I was a little surprised because he's clever, therefore, I interpreted his results as a lack of study. Later I learned that his mother is suffering from cancer (which is enough to affect anybody psychologically). At the time, his mother had not wanted to be alone and he was the only one in the house in the evening, so when he was supposed to have extra tuition with me, she would not let him go many times. The only test that he passed was the one he came to tuition for ... Once again an example of the extent of the effect of our actions. We have to look beyond ourselves and see if what we are doing (and how) is having an impact on other people.

4. I have just read a book *Letter to My Daughter* (2008) by Maya Angelou. One piece in particular touched me, and gives an overview of the book⁹:

There have been many people in my life who meant me well and, taught me very valuable lessons and others who meant me ill and have given me ample notification that my world is not meant to be all peaches and cream.

I have made mistakes and no doubt will make more before I die. When I have seen pain, when I have found that my ineptness has caused displeasure, I have learned to accept my responsibility and to forgive myself first, then apologize to anyone harmed by my misreckoning.

Since I cannot un-live history, and repentance is all I can offer to God is my regret, I hope that my sincere apologies have been accepted.

You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them. Try to be a rainbow to someone's cloud. Do not complain. Make every effort change to things you do not like. If you cannot change them, change the way you have been thinking. You might find a new solution.

Never whinge. Whining lets a brute know that a victim is in the neighbourhood. Be certain not to die without having done something wonderful for humanity. I have given birth to one child, a boy, but I have thousands of daughters. You are Black and White, Jewish and Muslim, Asian, Spanish-speaking, Native American and Aleut. You are fat and thin and pretty and ugly, gay and straight, educated and unlettered, and I am speaking to you all. Here is my offering to you. (Angelou 2009: xi - xii)

I [Aida] think this is good advice, from somebody who has a remarkable way of life! Something we should try to apply in our day-to-day lives. (Ap: 12-14)

Aida and I met and talked about her diary in January. She said the diary had brought the results of the free association to the forefront of her mind, especially at a time when she was adjusting to new realities: returning to university and starting a different type of work. I considered that it served a similar function for her, as my friend's comments had for me. My aim with the journal had been to remind Aida of the things she had learned through free association, and it seemed to have achieved this. However, when we met I did not feel we had "concluded" our work. I considered some quantifying of the results

⁹ Aida quoted from the Portuguese translation, as can be seen in the appendix, but I took the above text from the English novel.

was needed, so I decided to develop a feedback questionnaire which would look at both the method used and the outcomes obtained, to evaluate in a more quantified manner, how participating in the free associative film analysis trials might have helped Aida. I sent this to Aida in May 2010. (Ap: 15-17)

The questionnaire contained ten questions. The first five were about the process itself. Answers were classified on a four-point scale (1- very easy/almost automatic; 2- easy; 3- a little difficult; 4- very difficult). I also encouraged the volunteers to explain their answers.

QUESTION 1: Was it easy to select the film for the process?

QUESTION 2: Was it easy to identify the connection points?

QUESTION 3: Did establishing these connection points make it easier to do the free association than working with the whole film?

QUESTION 4: Was it “physically” easy to do the free association?¹⁰

QUESTION 5: Was it “emotionally” easy to do the free association?

Questions 6 to 10 were about the effects free associative film criticism had on volunteers. Again answers were classified on a four-point scale, but the numbers referred to different realities (1-definitely and positively; 2- moderately; 3- a little; 4- not at all).

QUESTION 6: Was the free association beneficial to you?

QUESTION 7: Did it make you aware of the uniqueness of your positioning in the world?

QUESTION 8: Did it help you accept and/or appreciate this uniqueness?

QUESTION 9: Did it help you to identify issues or conceptualisations that were affecting your psychological well being?

QUESTION 10: Did it make you feel happier about yourself?

In addition, volunteers could write freely on how they considered involvement in this project had affected them.

Aida’s answers

QUESTION 1 – Was it easy to select the film for the process? - (2) – easy as “It was rather easy as it is one of my favourite films”.

¹⁰ I am separating the physical and emotional process because the free association process can be physically quite automatic, as long as there is a quiet environment so thoughts can flow freely; but at times people feel a need to interrupt the process as it can raise issues that are difficult to deal with.

QUESTION 2 – Was it easy to identify the connection points?- (2) – easy as “It wasn’t difficult but it wasn’t automatic either. I had to see the film 2 or 3 times. The first time I watched it I got a general idea. Once the general idea was identified, the more I watched it, the more details I found and in time the connection got easier and easier.”

QUESTION 3 – Did establishing these connection points make it easier to do the free association than working with the whole film? (2) – easy as “It makes it easier. I identified the points that somehow had an impact in me and then I started to think why, which started the free association process. I think the connection points are like the key that makes the engine start. Once it starts, the process develops more fluently.”

QUESTION 4 – Was it “physically” easy to do the free association?(1) – very easy/almost automatic

QUESTION 5 – Was it “emotionally” easy to do the free association? (2) – easy- as it was sometimes rather difficult as it made me remember situations I went through. On the other hand, I think it helped me to see them in another perspective. I sort of lived them again but in a more conscious way.

QUESTION 6 – Was the free association beneficial to you? (1) – definitely and positively as “It was very beneficial as it made me aware of some of the things that are important to me. It made me more conscious of who I am/ want to be. It is not only an analyses of the past but the creation of an awareness towards the future. I also believe that by doing it constantly (through films, books and perhaps some situations) we can gradually learn about and build our identity.

QUESTION 7 - Did it make you aware of the uniqueness of your positioning in the world? (1) – definitely and positively

QUESTION 8 - Did it help you accept and/or appreciate this uniqueness? (1) – definitely and positively

QUESTION 9 – Did it help you to identify issues or conceptualisations that were affecting your psychological well being? (1) – definitely and positively

QUESTION 10 - Did it make you feel happier about yourself? (1) – definitely and positively

Please write a little on how involvement in this project affected you.

As I already explained some of my answers, I will only complete some main ideas.

You asked me once, in one of the e-mails we changed, if Trevor’s death (sacrifice) was really necessary. I sincerely believe that the same could have been achieved if Trevor hadn’t died, even if he hadn’t known the impact of his actions. But I think his death had a point: to show how the movement spread, in a practical way (through the people who put it into practice) and spiritually/consciously (through those who were touched by Trevor’s actions) - at the end, the enormous group of people arriving to his house, holding candles, validates that this movement can be a real thing that we can put in action.

I believe that if Trevor hadn't died, his actions would have been known through the reporter who was studying the pay it forward movement. But the impact wouldn't be, perhaps, so strong. I also believe that his death shows how in such a short passage through this world someone (in this case Trevor) can make such a difference. Especially in a frenetic world where, most of the times, we live numb and unconscious lives.

I identified "change" (as the absence of self-indulgence) as one important successful pattern in my life. By becoming aware of this, I now believe to have the tools to fight it and identify the situations where I can use it in my own benefit. (Ap:15-17)

Aida's answers provided positive support for both the method's ease of application and positive outcomes. I was particularly pleased to read her description of how selecting contact points assisted her free association, -"I think the connection points are like the key that makes the engine start." (Ap: 15) I had experienced the same thing when working with *Elizabethtown*. Aida's replies supported my intuitive notion and Fromm's theory that free association yielded more powerful results when linked to specific events. It supported my idea that for this form of analysis to work well, the reviewer should not look at the whole film, but rather investigating emotions generated by particular scenes, sequences and/or moods.

For me, selecting both the film and the connection points was relatively straightforward. However, it was not always easy – either physically or emotionally – to follow the free associative sequences through to the end, especially if these led to consider issues that had negatively influenced lives. The more focused approach facilitates is necessary to maintain a central purpose. It is important to note that Aida's association functioned mainly to reinforce her life choices and increase her knowledge of self, as indicated by her answers to questions six through ten. She did not encounter barriers as I had done in the opening scenes of *Elizabethtown*. We shared some aspects of the experience, but not all. Nevertheless, we both benefited from our perseverance.

Aida had no physical difficulty following her associative thought patterns, but it had not been so easy emotionally. She wrote, "it was sometimes rather difficult as it made me remember situations I went through. On the other hand, I think it helped me to see them in other perspective. I sort of lived them again but in a more conscious way." (Ap: 16) These statements indicate some resistance, but not much. Her associative analysis had not been as easy as mine to the road trip, but certainly not as difficult as the analysis of the reversing truck scene. The specificity of response also indicated the importance of selecting specific scenes to analyse.

I found her answer to question six revealing and rewarding; she stated that the free association project “not only [offers] analysis of the past but the creation of an awareness towards the future”. (Ap:16) The process allowed her not only to reconcile herself to her past, but also to prepare an appropriate future. Questions seven through ten, on the appropriateness of the process, got the highest possible score, indicating that the methods had worked well for her. (Ap: 16)

At the end of the questionnaire, there was a section, where Aida could comment openly on how her involvement in the project influenced her. Aida returned to the subject of Trevor’s death, and I was pleased about that, as we had discussed this topic at different times over the course of our conversations. When we began the process, I was bothered by Aida’s feeling that Trevor’s death was the best ending. I was not happy about the implication she seemed to have interiorized previously that martyrdom was necessary to change society. When she returned to this topic in her final statement, there had been a significant shift in her understanding. Whereas she had initially felt that the pay it forward program would have stalled without Trevor’s death, she concluded that though the final scenes were poignant, the program could have been effectively promoted without this. She no longer felt the need for a martyr. Finally, she ended her analysis of the project by indentifying a personality trait which she aspired to “use to her benefit”. All in all, the outcomes of this initial project were very satisfying and encouraging. Still, I contacted Aida on two later occasions: the first get her reaction to issues that had arisen from the other trials, and the second to see how involvement with the project had influenced her in the long term.

Online conversation on 23rd August 2010. As I was working with Aida I was also doing other individual free associative film analysis and STAI tests with larger groups. As indicated earlier, I had felt that Aida experienced a positive bodily reaction to the “cup of coffee” scene and this was one of the reasons I proposed this to her as a connection point. I started to notice that positive physical reactions appeared common with other volunteers also. On the other, volunteers moved in their seats and averted their eyes to avoid watching scenes that spoke to potential psychological blockages. This reminded me of the strategies I had developed to avoid watching the opening scenes of *Elizabethtown*. I also noticed that volunteers were able to watch and re-watch films with which they connected, even if this was not normally their habit.

As Aida had been my first and one of my most articulate volunteers, I decided to question her directly about these subjects. We were not able to meet face to face

because of busy work schedules, but we discussed the issues online. I include excerpts of our conversations below. I had three questions. I wanted to know if Aida shared the opinion that we interact physically with the films that meet us, so I asked: "You said you picked *Pay It Forward* because it moved you, - did you "feel" a physical attraction?" She answered that *Pay It Forward* evokes physical and emotional reactions in her. Then I asked her if she had free associated with any of the books or films she had read or watched since we worked together on *Pay It Forward*. She said no, due to lack of time and to the fact that there had been no intimate connection with the books she had read recently. I further asked if she still enjoyed watching *Pay It Forward* after we had worked in such a detailed manner on it. She answered her feelings were the same; as she watched it multiple times it became more "normal" but never boring (Ap: 18). She had watched *Pay It Forward* six times, and always ended crying. The feelings were still there, and the thought "I wish I could do something to help someone" didn't go away (Ap: 19). The same is true with me concerning *Elizabethtown*. I no longer feel the discomfort I used to feel at the beginning, but the road trip still raises my spirits. With the film trials in schools, etc., I have seen it at least 50 times, but I can still watch it and actually enjoy it.

The practical research and analysis of the results of the whole project extended over nearly two years, and this gave me the opportunity to speak to Aida again on 17th May 2011. The main purpose of this conversation was to determine if involvement in the project had brought long-term advantages to her life. When we met, she was busy and happy. She had again changed jobs, but planned to stay in this one for a longer period. She had secured a good position in one of the best companies operating in her field. She was very happy with her conditions and prospects, and was hopeful that she was on the good career path she had spoken about during our first conversations. Her only problem at the moment was trying to write her master's dissertation while working full-time in a demanding job.

Over the previous months she had read very little, she admitted that days and weeks went by when she did not think of the project. However, she told me, she still remembered what she had learned. There had been no disadvantages, only advantages. She felt participating in the free associative film project had had a very positive influence on her life. She felt it helped her to assume, even embrace, her somewhat alternative life style. In general the project had influenced her perspective, more than her habits. In the short term, it made her look inside herself and gave her understanding

as to why she sought the things she did from life. She commented, we often know quickly what we do not want, but it is hard to know what we do want. This project allowed her to take time for herself to discover her own “script”. In the long term, she hopes to carry this with her throughout her life.

She definitely felt that connecting with *Pay It Forward* helped her to recognize her identity theme and that the follow up sessions allowed her to take the process farther than she would have otherwise. She also felt that the method was appropriate. She liked the way that it had been flexible. She referred to writing the journal, which had been helpful to her, but which she felt had not been part of the original plan. She felt that the program had been adapted to her needs and this made her feel good about being involved in it (*cf.* Ap: 20-21).

2.5 Volunteers' Free Association Projects – Anna's story

Anna, my second volunteer, was 25 years old when she started the free association project. She is a university graduate and professionally successful. She volunteered for the project because she was very interested in working with a film to understand more about herself. She chose Emile Ardolino's *Dirty Dancing* (1987) as the film she wanted to study. When I explained the project and the free associative selection process, she knew immediately that she wanted to use *Dirty Dancing*. This film had spoken to her deeply when she watched it first as an adolescent and she had seen it innumerable times since then. Despite repeated viewings, she never tired of it. It always had a very positive influence on her state of mind and spirit. She thought it would be interesting to know why, and felt it would be an added advantage if she could understand more about herself by focusing on her interaction with the movie. I knew Anna read widely so again I was struck by the fact that she chose "a bit of fluff" to work with. However, I kept an open mind because I had seen what "bits of fluff" had done for me and for Aida.

Calendar of Events

Early Oct 2009: We talked about the project and Anna confirmed her interest. I explained the free association selection process.

23rd October: She informed me that she wanted to work with *Dirty Dancing*. We arranged for Anna to send her first explanatory text over the next few days.

27th October: Anna sent her first text explaining her connection to *Dirty Dancing* and expanding on why she had chosen this movie.

4th November 2009: We watched *Dirty Dancing* together.

13th November 2009: I received an email from Anna to say that she hadn't sent me her associations yet, not because she had not tried, but because it was proving to be very difficult. She wrote that she hadn't known how deeply the film was bound into her being or how important the associative writing might be.

16th November 2009: Anna sent her association.

November-December 2009: We communicated by email.

6th January 2010: We met to talk about Anna's free associative film criticism and her reactions to this.

13th January 2010: We watched Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown* together and discussed how the concepts of success and failure, acceptance and rejection are

demonstrated in this film. Anna filled in the STAI questionnaires before viewing the film and repeated the SAI questionnaires after watching the movie.

24th Feb 2010: We had our final face-to-face meeting in this sequence.

18th May 2010: Anna sent me a very significant email.

4th June 2010: I sent Anna the feedback questionnaire and she returned it the same day.

19th July 2010: I received another significant mail.

11th June 2011: We met to discuss the project. Anna repeated the STAI questionnaires.

As the calendar of events shows, I worked for nearly two years with Anna, but intensely for just four months, from November 2009 to February 2010. From February onwards Anna worked on her own and at her own pace, but she consistently applied the knowledge she acquired from her free associative film criticism and this produced very significant results in her case. Her story is different to Aida's because Anna's free associative work opened up new possibilities for her. Through her free associative film criticism, her understanding of *Dirty Dancing* became very significant for her. Therefore, this section begins with a detailed plot summary to contextualize Anna's free associative film criticism.

Technical information, plot summary and reception of *Dirty Dancing*

Technical Information: *Dirty Dancing* 1987, directed by Emile Ardolino, written and produced by Eleanor Bergstein

Running time, 100 minutes [dvd]

Principle Actors: Patrick Swayze (Johnny Castle), Jennifer Grey (Frances Houseman "Baby")

Supporting Cast: Cynthia Rhodes (Penny Johnson), Jerry Orbach (Dr. Jake Houseman)

Plot summary: I produced a more detailed plot summary for this review as this is necessary to demonstrate Anna's initial, inaccurate character reconstruction and her displacement of power positions. Also, her free associative film analysis to specific scenes is better understood when this is seen within the context of the overall dynamics of the movie.

Dirty Dancing is set in Kellerman's Resort in the US Catskill Mountains during the summer of 1963. It opens with the Housemans, a typical upper-middle class professional family, driving to their family holiday in Kellerman's where they will be wined, dined and entertained. Baby is the younger of two teenage girls and the pride and joy of her father Jake, who is a doctor. She plans to study economics and enter the

Peace Corps. In the car they talk about Baby's plans. As they arrive, Johnny Castle also drives into the resort. Johnny is a professional dancer; like most of the other entertainers, he is from a working class background. Dancing is not only his passion, but his only way out of his original neighbourhood. He is hired to teach the guests by day and entertain them by night.

We are quickly introduced to the two-tier society behind the glittering facades. Johnny and the other dancers, especially his partner Penny, are physically striking and dextrous. When they enter the dance floor, their energy and skill dominate the scene. Their dexterity and costumes give them an air of power and sophistication that seems to say they own the dance floor – they are there as equals. However, as soon as they stop their performance, they are reduced to the status of hired “hands”, flattering partners, even gigolos. Still, Baby is fascinated by their physical prowess; their presence introduces her to a vibrant, *dangerous* world. She gets into one of their secret after-hours parties and is amazed at the abandon with which they dance when they do not have to answer to anyone. Baby meets Johnny, there is an attraction between them, but as a veteran of the circuits he suspects her motives and considers her naiveté potentially dangerous. He loves to dance, and he knows that to keep working as a dancer he has to avoid scandal.

All goes smoothly until Penny gets pregnant. Although Johnny is not the father, he promises to take care of her. The only way out is a back-street abortion. Unfortunately, neither Johnny nor Penny have the money for this. Worse, it can only be done on a night when Johnny and Penny must dance for Kellermans at another resort, or get fired. Baby, who has managed to enter the fringes of the staff circle, offers a solution to both problems. She asks her father for money and offers to take Penny's place in the exhibition dance. Johnny does not approve of either solution, but seeing no alternative agrees to teach her to dance. The exhibition dance goes reasonably well; not so the abortion. Penny returns to the camp bleeding copiously. Not knowing what else to do, Baby wakes her father and he takes care of Penny. He is caring and gentle with her, but scathing with Johnny, thinking he is the father. Deeply disappointed in Baby, whom he feels has betrayed his trust and compromised his professional integrity, he forbids her to associate with “those people.”

But it's too late. Baby and Johnny had fallen in love while Johnny prepared Baby for the exhibition dance. They start a clandestine affair. Because of their new proximity, Baby understands how different Johnny's life is from hers for the first time.

She sees his talent, drive and ability, but she understands that these qualities alone are not guarantees of success. She witnesses Johnny's humiliation at the hands of his employers, and the degrading attitude demonstrated by wealthy guests. She wonders why he does not act and react as she has seen him do with his own people, because she does not really appreciate how little power Johnny has outside of his own circle. When he is accused of stealing, Baby comes forward and says he is innocent; they spent the night of the theft together. Johnny is fired for having a relationship with a guest. Though the real thieves are caught, the damage has been done. Johnny and Baby have a tearful farewell. Baby's father's disappointment is terrible for her to endure, but she defiantly informs him that she does not regret a moment she spent with Johnny. She is bitterly disappointed with the world this relationship has revealed to her.

But all is not over. Johnny's background and the subservient attitude necessary to maintain his job, have given him very little confidence in himself. However, Baby has taught him to believe in his own worth as a person and a dancer. He returns to Kellermans' on the last night of Baby's stay, to perform the final show that he has always dreamed about but has never been allowed to do. He picks Baby as his partner and they dance sensationally. Baby's father learns during the show that Penny had not been pregnant by Johnny, but by one of "his people" – a university student on the staff. As Baby and Johnny dance together, all the film's good characters are empowered and exonerated; the bad/mediocre stay as they were, but they have been exposed.

Critical review: *Dirty Dancing* received some excellent reviews; many applauded its energy, but it was also criticised as formulaic. However, it was a huge box office success among all age groups and won many awards, including an Academy Award for best original song, Golden Globes and Grammys.

As in Aida's case, I began the work with Anna asking her to write a short text explaining why she had chosen *Dirty Dancing* for free associative film analysis. The original Portuguese text she wrote can be found in the appendix, but the translated version is below. The print face, italic and straight, are as she presented them because this is an analytical text:

I picked **Dirty Dancing** because it is a film that shows us that nothing is impracticable: from an impossible love to learning to dance. The characters in the film overcome many challenges and reach different objectives while simultaneously constructing a beautiful love story.

The first time I saw this film was in the 90s. Although, I was just a child at the time, over the years my opinion about the film has not changed much. At the time I viewed it from a different perspective and now I understand the situations it portrays more clearly; however, the emotion it generates in my heart is the same.

I do not consider myself a romantic person, but I have to admit that beautiful love stories, whether told through film or literature, move me deeply. I am not referring to the sappy love triangles that we come across sometimes, *rather I mean those stories that can teach us something, where the characters overcome different obstacles, learn from each other and in the end get their final reward: they live happily ever after.*

When I “see” these stories I dive into a fantasy world and wallow in beautiful fairytales, forgetting hard realities and living dazzling moments and for that reason I think these stories are one of my refuges.

However, then I often find myself thinking of the continuation of the story and I conclude that the real world is not the same, reality is much more complex than fiction. *Rationality does not let me dream much and that is the reason why I become so absorbed in fictional worlds* [that I relate to] whenever I watch movies or read books. (Ap: 24)

I looked closely at this text for clues as to why she had connected so powerfully to this film. I had the following sections in mind when I met with Anna to view *Dirty Dancing* together, to select the connection points, and explain the free association procedures. The sections were:

[...] because it is a film that shows us that nothing is impracticable: from an impossible love to learning to dance. The characters in the film overcome many challenges and reach different objectives while simultaneously constructing a beautiful love story.

[...] rather I mean those stories that can teach us something, where the characters overcome different obstacles, learn from each other and in the end get their final reward: they live happily ever after.

Rationality does not let me dream much and that is the reason why I become so absorbed in fictional worlds.

All these passages indicate that Anna wants to believe that there can be romance, beauty and love in life. Her romantic ideas are not limited to relationships; they include dreams as well as difficult but beautiful and rewarding achievements. The final paragraph seems to indicate that for some reason she does not have the opportunity to do these things in her life.

When I met Anna and before we watched *Dirty Dancing* together, she asked if I had been surprised at her choice of such a frivolous film. I admitted that I had been a little surprised because I knew the range of books and films she enjoyed. However, I

assured her that we connect with all kinds of films. I pointed out that *Elizabethtown* was not a highbrow film, yet I learned much from it. I also assured her that the connection with a film that “meets us” is not intellectual, though a film that appeals to our intellect may also meet us. What is relevant is that the film bonds with the viewer. I explained that these links could be either conscious or unconscious, and that I am trying to establish in my work whether the viewer can gain clarity as to their unique identity themes (or positioning in the world, as I have been calling it recently) by understanding these connections. Also, I pointed out that what she had written about *Dirty Dancing* was not frivolous or superficial. This relaxed Anna as we began to work with this film.

Before watching the film, I asked Anna if she would like to add anything to her written summary. Anna opened her heart to me concerning her feelings of inadequacy about her physical appearance and her abilities. This surprised me, as Anna is pretty, if not beautiful. She dresses simply and conventionally and wears little or no makeup. I had seen her operating in her professional environment, where she appears quietly confident of her ability. I knew her to be a hard worker who puts her heart into her work, so I was surprised at what she was telling me. She explained that when she watched *Dirty Dancing*, her feelings of physical inadequacy were forgotten as she entered the film’s world.

Despite her career progression, she told me that she often questioned her academic and professional achievements. She attributed this to the fact that her parents, in particular her mother, had been very demanding as she was growing up. Throughout her school life, her mother had never praised her achievements – if she received a B, her mother asked why she hadn’t gotten an A; if an A, why not an A+. Despite a rural working-class background, where little money could be spared on education, Anna’s hard work and determination meant that she was the first member of the family to graduate from university. Though her mother appreciated this, Anna never really felt that she had done enough to satisfy her.

As she spoke about the film, I realised that Anna truly loved the freedom and physical prowess associated with the dance scenes. I asked her if she had ever thought about dancing lessons, and she told me that she found it difficult to take time off for herself; for example, she was unable to sleep late on a Saturday, even if she was really tired because she had been working hard. As our conversation progressed, she told me that she didn’t like to talk or even think about her “self”, but she had gotten to a stage where she felt she needed to do this. She did not want to have a psychologist dissecting

her mind, but she felt she could try to see why this film touched her and talk through it – especially as she could do this at her own pace. From her comments, I knew this film stirred deep feelings in Anna’s heart and mind. I was concerned about her doing the free association, but she assured me that she wanted to try – even if it meant exploring some of her “darker areas”.

I explained how I had selected my connection points to *Elizabethtown* by showing her the clips I had connected with. I told her we would try to find her connection points to *Dirty Dancing* as we watched the movie together. I also explained the free associative film analysis process itself, paying particular attention to Lichtenstein’s claims that each person has a unique identity theme and that everyone can aspire to happiness if they know and accept this and take it into consideration when making important decisions.

As we watched *Dirty Dancing* together, Anna seemed to really enjoy all the dance scenes, but the scene where Baby confronts her father appeared to bother her. When we discussed them later, she was not sure if these were her connection points, and said she would watch the movie again on her own to see if they were. One thing struck me as we discussed the movie. Anna cast Johnny as Baby’s liberator, despite the fact that Johnny states clearly in the movie that Baby has liberated him, Anna did not read the situation that way. In fact, she felt that Johnny and Baby would not stay together because she did not think someone like Baby would not be able to maintain the interest of someone like Johnny. Sooner or later he would leave her.

Though Holland had clearly stated that in free associative literary criticism there is no right or wrong answer, I felt it was important for Anna to see how she had misinterpreted Johnny and Baby’s circumstances, perhaps because of defense mechanism deviation, as discussed in chapter one. I considered that if Anna could see the situation as Johnny presents it, something might change for her. I asked her to try to think about this scenario from a different perspective; to look at Baby as the brave one whose courage, kindness and example made Johnny believe in himself. I pointed out that Baby found solutions to difficult problems, was willing to accept challenges and change, and challenged conventions, disobeying her beloved father. Ultimately, Baby was the author of the change in Johnny. Anna listened, but she wasn’t ready to change her ideas yet.

Anna said that she would send me her free associative criticism in 3 weeks. When this didn’t happen, I e-mailed her to see how she was because I knew our

conversation had touched on delicate issues. She wrote back and said that she was fine, but that doing the association was proving longer and more difficult than she had imagined. She wrote:

[...] it was not easy for me to understand the real importance of this film for me. I underestimated the 'power' of this activity. I am trying to muster up the courage to sit in front of the computer and write what has been filling my head since that evening." (Ap: 25)

I replied to say that this was fine and also to say that I was looking forward to receive her work. The following week she sent me her association. As I read, I was aware that she was not writing everything that free association had brought to her mind. This was not a concern because I had told both Aida and Anna that they did not need to share everything with me. What is important is that the person doing the free association follows each line in their process to the end. Anna's introductory note made it very clear that the free association had raised important issues for her:

Suddenly I find millions of meanings in some images, my head does not stop and my fingers can't type fast enough to keep up with my thoughts. Is it possible? Now I understand why this film and others of the same type are so important for me and mean so much to me. After all I am not the dreamer, the "soppy school girl!" that I was afraid I was. It was so good to be part of this project! I not only learned a lot about myself, but also how to use this "self-knowing" technique. I am very grateful to you for this!

I do not know if the text I wrote is the type that you want or need, and I don't know if the conclusions that I arrived at are the most correct, or even if all the arguments that I found and use are not merely excuses that justify me feeling sorry for myself ... I can only say with a clear conscience, that nothing that I wrote was written haphazardly, and it all involved careful reflection and a very detailed introspective analysis. Although everything is much clearer to me now and I can identify a limitless range of meanings, I selected those [parts of the film] that influence my life more and that appear most relevant. I made an enormous effort and I revealed myself, as much as I could, but I admit that I didn't go 100%,. I do not know to what point you will understand this as you read my text because you do not know me intimately, but believe me: for me this text goes deeper into my being than I have gone at any other time and more than I thought I would be capable of ! I did not think before doing this that I would be able "to dig into a central issue so deeply" and if this had been an oral exercise instead of a written one I could not have gone so far. However, if you want to talk about this now with me, I am willing to do that. (Ap: 25)

I was very moved by what Anna had written. Though I had felt the benefits of associative writing to a film that met me, my process had been very different to hers. My awareness had experienced a steady, gentle awakening during which I gradually gained a new insight. On the other hand, Anna described a very energetic and dynamic awareness. She wrote of frantically trying to type thought sequences that were going

through her mind too quickly for her fingers to keep up. It seemed like a true “stream of consciousness” type writing. The type-face switching between *italic* and bold follows the transition between *free associative analysis* and rational analysis. However, this is my interpretation. Anna’s texts are presented below.

THE ASSOCIATION.

At the risk of making a superficial analysis, because my findings were not based on any academic theory [that I read about], I shall just explain objectively what I think was the primary purpose of this particular case study.

After much reflection (introspection that cannot be characterized as having been emotionally easy or comfortable to perform) I can conclude that after making a precise identification of the scenes that most move us, the message becomes clear.

SELECTED SCENES

The period during which the dance is taught to the female character (Baby) by the male character (John): a temporal space in which love grows between the two;

The scene where the female character has a conversation with her father and she manages to convey her deep pain for having disappointed him (this occurred after she revealed that she had spent the night with her lover, even though her father had forbidden their relationship);

The final scene, in which the two main characters dance the final dance in front of all present, showing their love and talent.

JUSTIFICATION

I selected the scenes mentioned above, because mentally I make a parallel between them, and this allowed me to decipher what the real meaning of this movie is for me and why I attach so much importance to it.

So I think when I watch this movie I assume the female character’s role both mentally and metaphorically. Everything that happens in this movie, in general, and selected scenes, in particular, is related to my personal life (and also transported to the professional aspect) or it represents what I would idealize for myself, let’s see:

Baby is a brave but naive character, unafraid to take risks and take the initiative that will allow her to live a great love with a physically attractive, experienced man who dominates a specific subject (here - dance), teaching this to Baby, a difficult task due to the limited time, and Baby’s limited practical knowledge of the topic. On this point I can say that I believe I am also courageous when it comes to facing challenges and overcoming obstacles: the more difficult the task is, the more pleasure I get from doing it. Moreover, finding a partner who literally has something to teach me and transmit to me, dominating me in a particular and controllable temporal space and adding new values to my life is something I seek. On the other hand, my self-esteem and self-confidence is very

low, so the fear of ridicule inhibits me from taking the initiative in most situations that would lead to exposure (I admire Baby for fighting for her love and not being afraid of disapproval); nevertheless I consider her to be a protective person who likes to care for others and, in fact, [there are times that] John demonstrates a certain weakness in his self-confidence, and Baby supports him and transmits her admiration to him, [thus] helping him to have more confidence in himself. They became then, a beautiful, passionate, balanced and happy couple, counter-balancing each other's strengths and weaknesses, and this is how I would idealise a romantic relationship for myself.

A point with which I identify with here is the desire to please, or rather, the fear of letting someone down. *In the movie Baby lives a love that is not supported, or even consented to by her family (this group represented in the film by her father) and this situation makes her immensely sad, however, this does not stop Baby from living this love intensely. Truly, this issue also finds parallels in my personality and my life. The fear of disappointing those I love best (immediate family) leads me to fail to perform many actions and be completely happy. In this issue, I would like to have Baby's courage and boldness when she confronted her father and explained the situation, [why she had maintained a secret relationship with Johnny despite her father's prohibition], facing the fact that she had disappointed him.*

In the final scene, the climax of this whole "battle" takes place. *Every effort that was made throughout the temporal space of the movie is now rewarded: despite the initial uncertainty that Baby demonstrated to perform the dance in public, she faces the challenge and surrenders fully to her partner, letting him guide her, she can finally perform the dance, her lover taught her, perfectly, here she demonstrates, complete confidence in John. This is the situation that I crave for me, [despite the fact that] I find it very difficult to trust and much less give myself completely to someone, no matter who that person is. [here she is talking about relationships in general].*

Moreover, in this [final] scene, Johnny demonstrates self-confidence, understanding his own value and addressing his accusers, and Baby's vision and presence were of significant relevance. Also I have a huge need to feel useful and valued by others.

Then finally, Baby's family approve her happiness. Happiness, harmony and approval: concepts that I want together in my life. (Ap: 26-27)

Anna commented that it had taken her a long time to do the association. The scenes she selected went deep into her heart, and also changed her perspective. I think the following points are relevant. Upon reflection, Anna realises that Baby – the character she identified with – is the strongest character of all. Baby is *brave, unafraid and can take initiative*. Changing her perspective on Baby allowed Anna to consider herself in a similar mould – *I am also courageous*. Previously Anna had seen Baby as subordinate to Johnny, whom she saw as valid, dynamic, and a motor of change for Baby. But after reflecting on the film Anna realised that Baby was the real motor of change. Baby learned new things, showed Johnny and his friends new ways, and found solutions to difficult problems.

Perhaps, one of the scenes that was most difficult for Anna to analysis was Baby's father rejection and scorn. She feels for Baby, because Baby is deeply upset by her father's displeasure. Still, Baby is unrepentant, and this does not make her a bad person. Free associating to this scene, Anna comments that she would like to have Baby's courage, because she often refrains from doing things because of fear of disappointing her parents. Anna and I were not able to meet again during December as she was very busy. We communicated by phone and email and I asked her to keep ideas from her free association in her mind, especially those related to the way Baby's family accepted her at the end. I also asked her to keep a diary referring to situations in which the association helped her. We arranged to meet again in January.

6th Jan 2010. I felt that it was important that we meet as equals, "on neutral ground". Therefore, I always arranged to meet Anna in the public foyer of the faculty where I work. We watched movies or had our conversations in classrooms, or on one occasion in the secluded corner of the library café. I did not want the idea of the therapeutic to enter the equation. As Waxler generated a roundtable approach in CLTL, Anna and I met as equals and discussed our interaction with films in educational settings. The first thing I noticed about Anna was that she looked physically different. As I approached her I did not recognise her immediately. Her public posture seemed more confident.

She told me that she had not been able to keep the diary because she did not really want to think about the film at this time, because the association had gone very deep into her heart and she wanted to step back a little. Despite this we talked very openly. She told me that she had learned in her head, but not yet in her heart, that she did not need her parents' approval for everything. She had strongly identified with the scene in *Dirty Dancing* where Baby told her father the truth about her relationship with Johnny, and was able to bear temporary disapproval because she was willing to fight for life and love. Anna could not yet stand up to her parents as Baby had; she felt that she would not be able to survive disappointing them. But reflecting on the scene and its overall context, she understood that she could not base all her decisions on trying to please others or meeting their standards. She would have to distance herself somewhat from her parents, for their good as well as her own. Anna admitted that this work had helped her realize that her mother was no longer autonomous, partly because Anna took care of many practical things like paying bills for her. Anna realised that she must help her mother do new things and meet new people, not do chores for her.

Anna acknowledged that the final scene of the movie is her fairytale come true: Baby is rewarded for her courage and generosity, and exhibits her love and talent for all to see. This made Anna realize that if she is to have a life of her own, she has to make time for herself. She doesn't have a boyfriend; she said laughingly that if she had one now, he would have to be either a saint or a wimp, as he would have to fit around her many time consuming commitments. She also admitted that perhaps she keeps herself busy because she does not want to stop and think about herself. As she learned to appreciate herself through the self-learning process, she came to be able to consider spending time on herself.

I challenged her to start her independence program by taking one night a week and at least one morning/afternoon of the weekend to herself. She promised to try – she had gone to a presentation of Tango lessons with a friend, and they were thinking of enrolling. I talked about the fact that we all make mistakes, but that doing something wrong doesn't make you a terrible person, and I encouraged her to be easier on herself. She wanted to continue our conversation, so I arranged to meet with her again the following week.

13th January 2010. Again I was surprised by Anna's appearance. She was just arriving at our meeting place. For an instant I was not sure if it was her or not. She was more vibrant, alive and attractive. She had a new haircut which really suited her, and she was wearing light makeup, which was not usual for her.

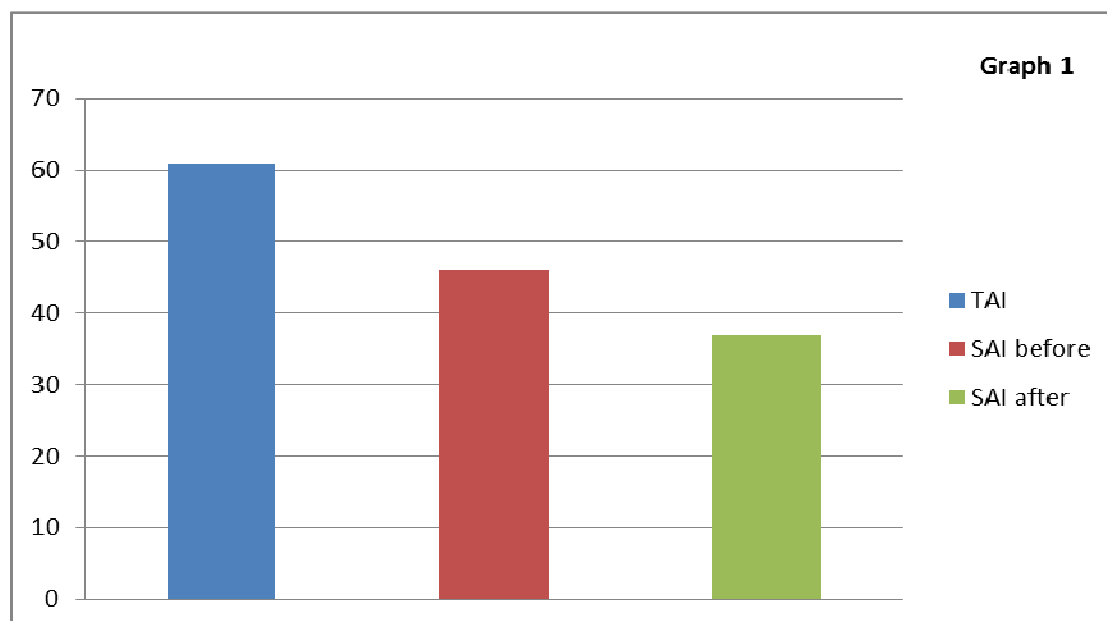
We talked in a small comfortable classroom usually used for postgraduate seminars and fully fitted with video equipment. She was well and happy. She said that the last few months had given her a new and different ability to look at herself, and she felt like she was beginning a journey. Though she was still a perfectionist and felt that she didn't do things right, she was determined to be kinder to herself, appreciating her good points and not focusing on what she considered her bad ones.

I reassured her that her concerns about herself stemmed from the fact that she was a conscious thinking being. I returned to how my free association to *Elizabethtown* had shown me aspects of my identity theme, such as my tendency toward self-blame, that I had to be careful about. I also illustrated how the associative work had allowed me to accept this and use it to my advantage. We talked about Lichtenstein's proposal that each person had a unique identity theme, an individual way of interacting with the world: implying that there was no good or bad theme per se. I stressed that identity

themes were no one's fault. There was no need to blame either herself or her parents, just to recognise that certain thoughts could potentially start a destructive process in her. She told me later that this notion helped her to accept herself and be less judgemental.

Anna didn't want to see *Dirty Dancing* again, but I had thought about watching *Elizabethtown* with her, for several reasons. Firstly, it illustrates the importance of perspective. Secondly, it shows that we need to take time for ourselves, which Anna needed to understand. Thirdly, results of the STAI trials already performed had shown that watching this film usually reduces anxiety levels. I wanted to see how it would affect Anna. In addition, I wanted to use the STAI test to measure Anna's trait anxiety level. Before we watched *Elizabethtown* together, I explained anxiety according to the model I had been using on group screenings presented in Chapter Three. I also explained the difference between trait and state anxiety. Then Anna filled out the STAI questionnaires. As can be seen in the graph below, her trait score fell at the lower end of the high anxiety category (61/80). Her state before we watched the film together (even after talking about serious issues) was (46/80), which is in the moderate anxiety category. After watching the film her state anxiety fell to (37/ 80), in the low anxiety category, and a full 24 points below her trait level.

Graph 1 Anna's STAI readings related to watching *Elizabethtown*



Interestingly, Anna said that normally she would have hated (might even have refused) to fill out the STAI questionnaire. It was still a difficult task for her, but much easier than it would have been before she had done the free associative work with *Dirty Dancing*.

Anna commented that she really enjoyed *Elizabethtown's* humour and insight. She commented that the film shows real perspectives of life in contemporary society and transmits a positive message about the more complicated situations in day-to-day life. When we spoke about the film together, she referred to the social satire of the scene when Drew leaves Mercury Worldwide Shoes forever in disgrace. As he drops his name badge into an empty jar, Ellen (his former girlfriend) pins a nametag on a new trainee's lapel in the background. Anna thought that this was a good portrayal of how we are all replaceable in the corporate world. In addition, she said that Drew and Claire's meeting at the end was like an extra for her, because the film really ended when Drew got his life back. I considered it significant that she did not need the happy romantic ending.

These meetings were very positive. They allowed Anna to talk about a lot of things, but always through her connections with characters in movies, either *Dirty Dancing* or *Elizabethtown*. Also topics were discussed at Anna's pace and according to her leading. Her reflections on her connections to the characters in *Dirty Dancing* was generating its own revolution in her mind, I felt the purpose of our meetings was to give

her a space to air her opinions and ask questions about her connections with the movies. However, the real work was taking place, in the privacy of her own mind, as she untangled her connections with the movie and corrected misconceptions of interpretation. After these two quite intense meetings in January, Anna appeared ready to work on her own again. Free associative writing/thinking is by nature a solitary activity; people simply need to be directed every now and then. Therefore, we did not meet again until the end of February. At this meeting we talked briefly about the project, but there is nothing significant to report. We stayed in touch by email. I asked Anna to let me know if/how the associative writing affected her on an ongoing basis. Although she was not really interested in keeping a diary, she said that she would write if anything significant happened.

On the 18th of May, Anna sent a mail explaining that she had not yet written about how the free association had influenced her because she had been really busy. She wrote, “I am always thinking about the benefits of the ‘experiment’ we carried out together. I don’t want to write just anything. I want to explore my thinking and choose the right words that best explain all the changes that I have felt in my life since we have shared this experience, thoughts and ideas” (Ap: 28). Despite this mail, I did not hear anything over the next weeks. However, when I sent the feedback questionnaire to Aida on 4th June, I also sent it to Anna. Unlike Aida, Anna replied the same day. Despite the speed of the reply, her text is open and honest about what she has and has not achieved and about what she hopes to attain (or wonders if she will ever achieve). Above everything else the text is full of recognition. It embodies awareness of self, protection of the intimate, and patience to achieve more. I actually felt humbled at the courage of this girl and realized the power of reflective interaction with fictional narratives presented in film.

QUESTION 1 - Was it easy to select the film for the process? (1) very easy. I always knew that this was my favourite film. I just didn’t know why ... I got to know why!

QUESTION 2 - Was it easy to identify the connection points? (3) a little difficult. I have to admit I had some problems with this point. I was really only able to understand the points that were most important because of the questions Cecilia asked me.

QUESTION 3 – Did establishing these connection points make it easier to do the free association than working with the whole film? (2) easy. The film conveys a general idea, but after realizing the logic of this process of study, everything becomes clearer and everything makes sense and has significance. In my opinion establishing the connection points is essential to follow the line of logic.

QUESTION 4 – Was it “physically” easy to do the free association? (3) a little difficult. I had some problems with this point too. I was only able to see the connection between fiction and transport this to my day-to-day life through Cecilia’s questions.

QUESTION 5 – Was it “emotionally” easy to do the free association? (4) very difficult. As I am an introvert, with little self confidence, who “lives in her own world”, it was quite difficult for me to write openly and admit the things I discovered during this process to myself.

QUESTION 6 – Was the free association beneficial to you? (1) definitely and positively. It allowed me to get to know myself better and begin a process of self-motivation and appreciation. I began to understand many things about myself, especially how I had been influenced by my upbringing and the environment I live in. I admit, on the one hand, that I have not been able to put everything I have learned into practice, on the other, I know that this is a task for the rest of my life. Since I began the project, I have changed a lot and I believe that I am moving a little in the right direction every day.

QUESTION 7 – Did it make you aware of the uniqueness of your positioning in the world? (2) moderately. Truthfully, I can say that I was able to understand this, however, it isn’t easy for me to admit this idea and much less to act on it. I am moving in that direction – taking baby steps.

QUESTION 8 – Did it help you accept and/or appreciate this uniqueness ? (3) a little. Not yet, but I understand that I will have to one day. I’m on the way.

QUESTION 9 – Did it help you to identify issues or conceptualisations that were affecting your psychological well being? (1) definitely and positively. At a certain point during the process, everything became very clear and through the film I really managed to find more reasons and justifications for my personality traits than I had ever thought possible. Nevertheless, I have to reiterate that it was not and isn’t easy to recognize many of the situations I understood.

QUESTION 10 – Did it make you feel happier about yourself? (1) definitely and positively. Not because of the writing itself, but because of the process it set in motion. I began to feel that I really was worth something and that I should take care of myself, even spoil myself a little sometimes. I have to make an effort to be the person I want to become, also knowing that change is a gradual process. I moved forward and will always forward when I can ... it isn’t easy. (Ap: 29 -31)

Anna wrote extensively to the question on how involvement in the project had affected her.

Really this process affected me deeply, there is no doubt about this!

I don’t know if the objectives of the experiment were accomplished, however I know that it affected me and that something changed in me. This actually happened quite spontaneously. Therefore, I prize the work highly and attribute the modifications to the process that started with Cecilia’s study.

Initially it was very painful, yes, because I had to dive deep inside myself and stay submerged there, I felt invaded by myself, if it's possible that we can feel something like this about ourselves! Then, I felt ashamed when I understood the roots of certain traits in my personality, how could they be possible in me? Are they really true? I wanted to cover everything up and forget what I had discovered, however, Cecilia wanted to go back and talk about the process that we had started together and despite the fact that I didn't open myself up even 50%, I always felt good after the talks we had. I felt supported, of value, I received justifications for my difficulties and alternative ways of thinking to help me overcome some habits and thinking patterns that had been entrained in my brain from years of use. All this happened without me feeling that I was being taken in by psychologists "dribble", professionals paid to act and speak. Well, then I felt that I had to take advantage of the experience, after all, it only involved watching a film and understanding why I liked it and why I identified with it ... how can this be? But, the truth of the matter was I had to take advantage of the fact that now I knew myself better, I had to try to identify my problems and less positive areas of my life so that I could improve and become the person I wanted to be, regardless of whether this meant taking a physical or psychological approach. On the other hand, another very important point in this process was understanding the reasons behind my attitudes and actions. Why am I like this? Why have I got this personality and not a different one! I know and admit that I was not able to face openly all that I saw. There are certain things that are really difficult to overcome when they have been part of our reality for our whole lives (in my case 25 years), this automatically implies that they will not change or be eliminated in "the blinking of an eye". But at least I became aware of them and I know that I will have to work a little each day to change and improve. I was also able to understand better, albeit if not as clearly as the others (because I wouldn't let this happen), why I should appreciate myself, but this is necessary, we have to love ourselves ... just even thinking about this makes my stomach ache. Why? For a series of motives; historic, social, educational, and others (now I understand), **it's not my fault**, also I'm all grown up now, mature enough to overcome the past and change and re-educate myself. Just because I am not happy the way I am, I'm not going to benefit from spending my life regretting and feeling sorry for myself, I really have to do something about this!

Well, in January I enrolled in a gym and I go there 4 or 5 times a week. I also went to a dietician and started to follow a supervised diet. I've lost 10 kilos and I feel prettier, better about myself and I realize that there is no harm in this! Now I buy beauty creams, clothes, do cellulite treatments and I don't think this is extravagant! I go to the beach even when I have loads of work to do because I deserve some leisure time (even if it's still only a few hours). I still spend time with my family. I will never give this up, [but I realize now] they need me as much as I need them! I go out at night, have fun because I deserve this and life rushes by! I bought a new bikini because last year's one is too big, just like most of my old clothes: I gave them all away! I'm going to sell the engagement ring my ex-fiancée gave me 5 years ago. We have to clean out the old to make room for the new, so I'm going to open my heart again because I deserve to be loved! In September I am going to begin my Masters Degree in an area I love - [...], just because I want to do it, because I want more and better things for me! This is so good, I know that many of the changes may seem insignificant to the ordinary observer, but to me they make all the difference!

I think I still don't love myself, I am not happy with all the results yet, but I know that one day I will be able to reach this feeling of fulfillment. I understand that we are not perfect, our human nature implies that we will never be satisfied with the goals we reach and by my "nature" I am very ambitious and a perfectionist and some times/ many times I am dissatisfied. I am not the one who will strike up a conversation with an interesting unknown stranger, I still do not make time in my day-to-day life to have a little time just

for me (nor do I consider this a priority), I don't see at least one romantic movie a week (future goal), I still don't make decisions without thinking about what my family will think or say, I'm still not my own priority, nor even the person I valorize most, I still don't do crazy things just for the fun of it, I still don't travel without explaining where I am going to my family, the fact that this might hurt them is still ingrained in my being, I still don't know how to say "no" and sometimes let others walk on me without even realizing it! I still haven't reached the weight or the look I want, I still don't have as much fun as I deserve, ... but I feel like I have started to climb the mountain and I am not going back, even if I loose my mountaineering equipment, I'll latch onto the rock face and keep climbing!

And all this ... after watching *Dirty Dancing* for the millionth time! (Ap.: 31-32)

At the outset of this project, I never expected results like those that Anna describes. But this form of free associative film analysis seems to gain a momentum of its own, as the viewer opens a space in their minds and lives to consider openly why they connect with specific moments and scenes in films. The film becomes a dynamic outside place where viewers can explore ideas and receive responses. It is also safe and neutral because, the film offers a medium where discussion need not be directed at any individual.

While working with Anna, I tacitly referred to Lichtenstein's identity principle and to Holland's method of defining unique identity themes through free associative analysis, throughout. Holland and Lichtenstein proposed their theories and use them suggesting that there is no good or bad identity theme. This made my volunteers feel more comfortable about seeking their unique position in the world. In my own, Aida and Anna's cases knowing our own identity theme seemed help us make coherent life decisions. This concept was central in my conversations with Anna and a solid foundation for a "no blame" philosophy. I also emphasised that Anna was doing something to help herself simply by participating in the project.

Because, such profound and personal issues were discussed, albeit through the guise of film, I made a conscious effort to include general chatter in our talks, to keep the atmosphere light. I learned from Cameron Crowe that you can deal with challenging issues when you can make another person genuinely laugh, so I always had some funny stories or banter that I knew she would enjoy – this often opened the door to be able to talks about deeper concerns. Anna is a teacher, like me, so we sometimes traded "war stories" and shared advice. She is very proud of her work, and from her stories I believe she does it very well; I tried to refer to this at least once during each meeting. Also, I was careful to watch for signs that we might be going too far, I would push to a certain point and then fall back.

During our three meetings, most of our conversations revolved around Anna's relationship with the film/characters/ connection points. For instance, I recognised as significant her misinterpretation and minimisation of Baby – the character with whom she identified. I felt that seeing Baby as the strongest character in the film would help Anna to see herself in the same way. I referred to specific real-world issues only after dealing with the characters in the film. In later sessions we processed issues through the characters of *Dirty Dancing* and *Elizabethtown*. In reality, Anna did 90% of the work alone, I simply used the films to introduce alternatives.

When Anna sent me her feedback in June I thought the project had finished, but I received a very excited email from her on 17th July 2010. In this she wrote about concrete plans for the future, and reiterated that understanding her connection with *Dirty Dancing* had helped her appreciate herself and understand her unique way of being in the world. She wrote that it had helped her to live in a place of achievement and reduced blame, though these were still things she had to work on. (Ap.: 33 -34)

Final Feedback one year later: I was curious to know about Anna's progress so I sent another feedback email which Anna answer on 2nd of June 2011 and we discussed in person. When I met Anna, she appeared relaxed and happy when we met. She was looking well, carefully dressed and made up in a style that I believe the "old Anna" would have felt was too daring to use, but which suited her. She had enjoyed her MA seminars. She was very busy when we met because she was teaching full time, finishing some course assignments and preparing her dissertation project. She was pleased that the professor of her choice had willingly accepted her draft proposal. She was able to accept this fact as a personal compliment; this professor is recognized as one of the leading experts in her field and many students want to work with her, so she refuses quite a number of proposals. Despite her busy schedule, Anna told me that she was still going to the gym and meeting with friends. Having fun and leisure time had become a priority for her.

She was also very excited about her new plans. Though she likes what she does, she had come to realize that there are not many opportunities for advancement in the particular field of vocational training in which she is engaged. Therefore, she and a fellow teacher, who is also a very good friend, had decided to set up a company. She said that before her free associative work, she would have been afraid of going into business for herself; but she felt that if she did not try it now, she never would.

She told me that the free association project had offered her practical tools for dealing with her personality/way of being in the world, and had provided new and liberating perspectives. Although she is still a perfectionist, she has become more confident and happier about herself. Despite her achievements, prior to our work she reported that she had little faith in herself and her capacities, and blamed herself for her “flawed” character. She felt an unconscious need to avoid looking closely at herself, because she didn’t always like what she saw. Free association had helped her understand more about her unique way of being in the world (her identity theme); considering that this theme arose from her nature and early nurture helped her to eliminate feelings of guilt. New possibilities opened up for her when she realized that considering her identity theme when making decisions could lead to happiness. Now, when she feels the “old dread” coming back, she looks at all she has achieved and how she has done it. She tries to fit “difficult” things into a framework that is manageable for her. She gave the examples of her masters’ dissertation. She knew she would have to do this properly; otherwise she would not be happy with herself or the work. Therefore, she picked a topic that interested her, knowledge about and selected a supervisor she respected. Rather than worrying about potential inadequacy or failure, she channelled her energies into achieving a positive result. Asking trusted colleagues for their honest opinions about her ability and the project itself, she worked hard to produce an appropriate proposal. Strategies like these make things that would previously have been very difficult not only feasible, but also enjoyable for her.

She is doing something similar with her business plan. She and her business partner will continue working in their schools while they finalized their business plan. As they are teachers they can normally manage to have some free time and they will begin the business in this time and with outside help. They will continue like this for a year and then decide if they should continue or not. If the business does not work, Anna will be disappointed but not ashamed.

She reiterated that one of the fundamental concepts she had absorbed from the project was that she could accept her failings. Another was that she could be happy; in fact, she had just as much right as any other person to strive for personal happiness and satisfaction, as long as she did this within a socially acceptable context. Free associating to a film she loved made the process easy and acceptable for a “fragile” psyche. She learned that there is nothing “wrong with her;” if she is different from other people, it is not her fault.

Anna said that participating in the project had influenced every aspect of her life. It had helped her to get to know herself better, accept herself and aspire to change because she no longer felt like the victim of the film of her life, but could be the heroine. The project had made her think some uncomfortable thoughts, but she was sure that in the medium/short term she could learn to deal with and accept some aspects of her personality that she still had to make peace with. Being involved in the project had very positive influences on her life. She got to know herself intimately and she learned that she could not hide the reasons why she was “less perfect” than she would have liked. Nevertheless, she learned that she had to take care of herself, that she needed to be a priority in her own life and recognize that she is a unique and individual being who deserves to be happy.

She said the follow-up sessions in January and February had been very important because they allowed her to calm the “troubled waters” that the free associations had caused and permitted her to process what was happening to her. A year after finishing the project, it is still as relevant as it was when she did it. In fact, she is sure that she will carry the project and its process with her for the rest of her life. She felt the methods and timings had been appropriate and allowed her to progress at her own pace in a non-judgmental environment (Ap: 35-36).

Based on my work with larger groups in the STAI tests, I wanted to see if involvement with the free association project had had any influences on Anna’s SAI and TAI readings. Therefore, I asked her to repeat the questionnaires and compared the readings to her earlier readings, registered eighteen months previously when she watched *Elizabethtown* in January 2010. Anna advised me that she did not feel particularly calm because of her work, college assignments and business plans, and thought her SAI readings would have been a lot lower when deadlines were not looming on the horizon. I told her not to worry about this – simply to fill in the SAI questionnaire as a truthful reflection of the way she felt at the moment, bearing in mind that there was no right or wrong answer.

I was truly surprised at the results: there was a massive reduction in both TAI and SAI. Despite the pressures she was feeling at the time she completed the questionnaires, her SAI stood at 35, similar to her score after watching *Elizabethtown* when she had felt well and happy. However, the truly amazing reduction was in her TAI levels, which dropped from over 60 to just 34. According to Spielberger, TAI scores are supposed to remain constant, especially when measured within the same age

context. However, this table clearly shows that Anna's TAI was greatly reduced (as was her SAI). This implies that something strongly positive had occurred in Anna's way of looking at the world around her. She appeared to be interacting with it more freely and easily. Our conversations had indicated that this was the case; it was reassuring to see this supported by quantitative results.

Aida and Anna's comments and feedback on the project validated both the procedure and the potential benefits of its application. The cases illustrate that free associative film criticism may significantly help the viewer to meet him/her self, and that this can lead to happier and more productive life choices. In Aida's case it helped her to accept a way of being in the world that was not so common among her peers but that had produced very successful results for her and those around her. In Anna's case she was able to understand, accept and valorise her way of being in the world and plan a future where she felt she could build happiness and success. My own free associative film analysis had also helped me to learn about personality traits that could lead to destructive tendencies. It also alerted me that for my way of being in the world or identity theme, I need to make time for leisure and the unexpected.

Borrowing from Anna's word, both practising and facilitating free associative analysis, I was amazed at what could be achieved by simply watching a movie that viewers connected it and considering these connections free associatively. However, the results of the free associative film analysis trials were not the only findings I encountered in my practical work investigating how watching films might affect minds and lives. At the same time that I was facilitating these individual trials, I was also observing how groups of volunteers reacted to watching selected films. The results of these group screening are presented in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three

Group Screenings

As presented earlier, I decided to use psychometric scales and self-reporting long-answer questionnaires with groups of volunteers watching specific types of films, in order to pursue the two research questions I had set for this work: first, gaining insight as to whether involvement with fictional narratives might have a positive effect on readers'/viewers' lives both during the more immediate period of contact with the book read or film viewed and in a longer term. Second, inquiring into the possibility of developing repeatable methods of working with films that preserve the enjoyment and uniqueness of the viewing experience while, at the same time, improving viewers' awareness of self and/or enhance coping skills.

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, free associative film analysis permitted detailed insight into the advantages offered by this type of reflective connection with films. However, because the method is time consuming and follows individual patterns, it would be difficult to get information on general trends in larger groups, unless it could be used in a teaching environment such as the one used by Holland and Schwartz and reported in *Know Thyself*. As I did not have this option and many psychometric scales are designed for use with large groups, I decided to use these to work with larger audiences, because they would also offer numeric data indicative of altered emotional states and more extensive information on tendencies.

However, as psychometric scales are trait specific I had to choose a trait to measure before I could select one. Relaxation was the first trait that came to mind when trying to identify positive reactions associated with reading books and watching movies. It is important to state that at the initial stage of the work, when choosing a psychometric scale, I considered reading books and watching movies as very similar activities because they both represent an escape into fictional worlds. Thus, when researching and selecting a trait to measure, I investigated each activity equally. However, because more academic studies had been produced on the advantages of reading fiction than watching movies I referred mainly to studies on reading including those published by Guthrie & Greaney (1991) and M. Cecil Smith (2000). Both identify relaxation as one of the principal advantages of reading fiction. Reviewing the literature on the subject, Guthrie & Greaney (1991) concluded in their chapter "Literacy Acts" that while adults read formal texts for instruction in workplace environments and to help them participate in their communities, they read fiction principally for leisure and relaxation (*cf.* Guthrie & Greaney 1991: 68 – 96).

M Cecil Smith also reached a similar conclusion when he asked adult volunteers to keep diaries where they recorded practices that normally accompany their reading habits and reactions to different types of texts. He reported in “The Real World Reading Practices of Adults” (2000) that workplace reading was mainly informative in nature and often associated with concentrated effort and note taking. Professional classes also followed similar patterns when reading work related texts at home. However, when reading fiction at home autonomously, readers generally identified relaxation as the principal source of enjoyment when reading. Concentration depended principally on the connection between text and readers, not on the readers’ effort. Nor did readers pursue formal activities like note taking. Thus Smith concluded that two factors are commonly considered to motivate reading, a desire to expand knowledge and relaxation, readers associate the former with instructive/work related texts and the latter with reading fiction for pleasure (*cf.* Smith 2000: 25-52). More generalist studies were also carried out to determine how leisure activities influence bodily states. The one carried out by Dr. David Lewis and his team at the MindLab associated with the University of Sussex offers an example of these.¹

I could not find any psychometric scales to measure relaxation. However, many have been developed to calculate its antithesis, anxiety, which has been extensively investigated by clinical psychologists and psychiatrists. I consider that relaxation and anxiety can be seen in this light, as antithetical, because relaxation techniques are used widely in many different forms of psychotherapies to counteract anxiety. In *Anxiety Management Therapy: A Behavior Therapy* (1990), regarded by many experts in the field as a handbook on stress and anger management, Richard Suinn, retired head of Psychology at Colorado State University regarded relaxation as the antidote for anxiety

¹ The idea that reading offers physical relaxation is also supported by experiments carried out by cognitive neuropsychologist Dr. David Lewis, a psychologist and Research Director at the Mindlab an independent consultancy laboratory based in the University of Sussex. Lewis was commissioned by Nestlé in 2009 to investigate the activities that allowed people to relax more. His team got volunteers to engage in strenuous physical exercise to raise heart rate and muscle tension at the beginning of the trials. These parameters were then measured and following this volunteers were asked to do one of the following relaxation activities: listen to music, play video games, have a cup of coffee or read a story. Heart rate and muscle tension were again measured and compared to the value after exercise. Reading a fictional text silently for just six minutes slowed down heart rate and relaxed muscle tone by sixty-eight percent. Conversely, playing a computer game for the same time period only reduced these parameters by twenty-one percent. Lewis proposes that reading may be such an efficient relaxation agent because it requires a form of concentration that distracts readers from their immediate surroundings. The result of these experiments were reported in many articles in the popular press including an article in *The Telegraph* newspaper (n/a 2009).

writing: “AMT [Anxiety Management Training] relies solely upon relaxation as the anxiety coping method” (121). While behavior therapies are not so commonly used in psychotherapies today, relaxation techniques are still used extensively to offset anxiety in many different forms of psychotherapeutic treatments as Clark & Beck point out in *Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders: Science and Practise* (cf. 2011: 260-275).

I was also interested in measuring alterations in anxiety levels because I considered that it would be pertinence to have factual data on how watching films might influence anxiety levels given the prevalence of disorders arising from this phenomenon in contemporary society. Charles Spielberger borrowed from W. H. Auden’s epic poem when he defined the twentieth century as “the age of anxiety” (1983: 4) in *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults Sampler Set*. However, if the term came from Auden, the support for the statement came from statistics. Moreover, recent studies seem to indicate that if the twentieth century was dubbed the age of anxiety, the twenty-first might be considered the age of anxiety disorders. According to the U. S. National Institute for Mental Health’s (hereafter referred to as NIMH) online publication *Anxiety Disorders*, 18.1% of the U.S. population today is affected by one of the following major anxiety disorders: chronic anxiety, GAD (Generalized Anxiety Disorder, expressed as exaggerated worry and tension under normal circumstances), obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and social phobias. Moreover, in their article, “Prevalence, severity, and comorbidity of twelve-month DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication” (2005a) Kessler *et al* propose that 22.8% of anxiety disorders are severe and debilitating (cf. Kessler 2005a: 617 – 627).

Also according to “Any Anxiety Disorder Among Children”, 25.1% of American teens are thought to be susceptible to anxiety disorders and 5.9% of these are believed to suffer from severe anxiety disorders. Moreover, in another publication, “Lifetime prevalence and age of onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication” (2005b), Kessler *et al* propose the very early age of eleven as the average age associated with the onset of anxiety associated disorders (cf. Kessler 2005b: 593-602). These figures encouraged me to gain insight into how something like watching a movie may influence state anxiety levels. While I consider that significant contact with relevant books or movies can offer more to readers and viewers than mere relaxation, the data presented above led me to reconsider the relevance of influencing state anxiety levels positively. I was quite shocked by these statistics, and though they speak to the U.S. reality, I consider that they can be

extrapolated roughly to the Portugal reality. They imply that in a 'normal' class of 28 students, 7 would be susceptible not to anxiety, but to an anxiety disorder, and 1 or 2 might actually be suffering from some form of severe anxiety disorder.

When I began to speak to teachers and coordinators about the possibility of doing group film screening trials with students to measure how watching film might alter anxiety levels, in general the proposal was received positively, sometimes specifically because teachers were dealing with the consequences of high anxiety levels in their classrooms. These initial discussions highlighted issues that would need to be addressed in group screenings. First, while people spoke about anxiety very few could make clear distinctions between fear and anxiety. Second, when people spoke about anxiety, in general they were often referring to symptoms arising from anxiety disorders, rather than anxiety. While they viewed anxiety as internal, they also considered that it was provoked by external factors. They were always thinking of something very negative and difficult to deal with, outside of the individual's control. In general, they were not aware of the fact that philosophers, who discussed this topic, from St. Augustine to Kierkegaard, Heidegger to Sartre (to mention but a few) proposed that anxiety can have positive influences. Therefore, although the central focus of my work was to see how groups reacted to certain types of films, because I would be measuring alterations in anxiety levels, I realized that I would have to explain this concept coherently to volunteer groups. While on the single group screenings the discussion was not very involved, as the work progressed I had to delve deeper into this subject matter to be able to answer volunteers' questions on the subject. I also needed to do this to be able to use the movie watching experience as an active tool in help volunteers deal with high anxiety levels and develop new coping skills, which after all had been one of my initial research objectives.

Martin Heidegger delineation of the fear and anxiety presented in *Being and Time* (1926) was very useful to explain the differences between the two concepts, especially his representation of the different origins and temporal activity of the two concepts. I used Heidegger's definitions and contemporary philosopher Simon Critchley's exemplification of these to all groups. Heidegger presents both anxiety and fear as modes of state-of-mind. However, while Heidegger saw both fear and anxiety as grounded primarily in *having been*, he proposed each has a different temporal sphere of activity because of their respective origins. Fear assails from what is external, its temporal sphere arises from the past and influences the present. Fear springs from the

lost present. However, anxiety arising from the person's own way of *being in the world* has a very real projection into all time spheres including into the future (cf. Heidegger 1962: 393-6). Simon Critchley's, representation of Heidegger's principles presented in *The Guardian* (2009) blog "Being and Time Part 5: Anxiety", was very useful when speaking to groups.

While maintaining Heidegger's original model's principles; Critchley offered practical examples that allowed me to explain central ideas easily and quickly. Using the traditional portrayal of women as being afraid of mice and crawling insects, Critchley demonstrated how fear is generated as a reaction to contact with concrete things in the real world at a particular moment in time, and generally based on previous negative experiences or education. In his example Critchley points out that fear is only exercised if the causative agent (the rodent or insect) is present. The external circumstances diminish the person's ability to appreciate the moment that is being lived. However, this fear does not affect the anticipation of the future when the individual can believe that this will be rodent and insect free. Thus fear is held in relationship to an external object or circumstance, which when controlled has minimal effect on the individual.

Anxiety, on the other hand as it is generated by the individual's way of being in the world, can strike at any time and is not dependent on external circumstances. Critchley defines it as an unexpected faceless internal assault arising from the individual's way of being in the world. Because anxiety is nebulousness, it does not mean ceaselessly fretting or fitfully worrying, nor is not necessarily always negative. In fact, it can lead individuals to move beyond the moment and position maintained and he used Sartre's *Nausea* (2007) and Camus's *The Outsider* (2000), as examples of how the strainings of anxiety permitted the authors to explore new realms.

However, just as Heidegger established, Critchley points out that there must be a security (a resoluteness as Heidegger defined it) in "Dasein²" for anxiety to produce positive results. To demystify the topic, group debates often began discussing the

² Heidegger defined Dasein (there-being) as the conscious individual's understanding of his/her own way of "*being-in-the-world*" (Heidegger 1962: 5). While there may be similarities between Lichtenstein's identity theme and Heidegger's Dasein, I consider that they can be differentiated in the following way. While Heidegger's Dasein refers to how the individual interacts with the world, and Lichtenstein shares this principles; they differ in that Heidegger's Dasein is a reflection of momentary interactions with the world and varies over time and is dependent on circumstances; Lichtenstein unique identity theme is constant throughout life. Also, Dasein refers to how the individual interacts with the world; unique identity theme identifies how the individual is seen from the outside/by the other to interact with the world. This can be seen to Lichtenstein's and Holland's many references to identity from the outside.

notion that that the contemplation of anxiety is not new dating back at least to the time of Augustine. Then, we talked about the fact that in the Christian tradition, philosophers interpreted anxiety with reference to God, Heidegger removed the divine sphere and interpreted it in relationship with the individual's life and death. We also discussed the fact that while the focus may have deviated, both Heidegger and Christian philosophers attribute the positive capacity to reformate the self when new circumstances arise to anxiety as Bo Jacobsen suggests in *Invitation to Existential Psychology: A Psychology for the Unique Human Being and its Applications in Therapy* (cf. Jacobsen 2007: 96-98).

We discussed the fact that Heidegger suggested anxiety could be positive for man because it “liberates him *from* possibilities which *count for nothing* [“nichtigen”], and let him become free *for* those which are authentic” (Heidegger 1962: 395). This debate often led volunteers to ask how anxiety could be positive and I presented the idea of a resolute Dasein because in Heidegger's ideology for anxiety to realize its potential there must be a resolute Dasein. The conscious individual must understand his/her own way of being in the world because anxiety arises out of the individual's personal way of interacting with the world, because “anxiety can mount authentically only in a Dasein which is resolute: He who is resolute knows no fear; but understands the possibility of anxiety as the possibility of the very mood, which neither inhibits nor bewilders him” (Heidegger 1962: 395).

Therefore, Heidegger's anxiety has definite positive features as it permits the individual to embrace self in new circumstances and strip away external narratives that may prevent or distorted this knowledge. But it can only be positive when individuals have a resolute Dasein and/or an environment that is meaningful and homely (*heimlich*). Critchley classifies anxiety as the first experience of freedom from things and other people. In Critchley's reading life without anxiety, while meaningful and comfortable, would be dull and banal:

Anxiety is the experience of the tide going out, the seawater draining away, revealing a self stranded on the strand, as it were. Anxiety is that basic mood when the self first distinguishes itself from the world and becomes self-aware.

[...] It is a freedom to begin to become myself. Anxiety is perhaps the philosophical mood par excellence, it is the experience of detachment from things and from others where I can begin to think freely for myself (Critchley 2009).

In *Invitation to Existential Psychology* (2007), Bo Jacobsen also writes about the potential benefits of anxiety. Using an existential psychology perspective and joining the thinking and writings of Rollo May, Soren Kierkegaard as well as Martin Heidegger and Irvin Yalom, Jacobsen writes: “Anxiety enters the scene when a new opportunity, a potential, emerges and confronts the individual with a new prospect of unfolding or fulfilling their life” (Jacobsen 2007: 96). However Jacobsen also highlights the potential difficulties that the type of encounter may hold for the individual because “this opportunity entails the destruction of an established sense of security. Therefore a desire to reject the new opportunity arises. This is where anxiety comes in” (96). Notwithstanding this difficulty, referring to Kierkegaard’s theories, Jacobsen still defines anxiety as “the dizziness of freedom” (96) that “demonstrates the presence of potential” (97).

Reading these proposals, it seems that there should be no disadvantages to anxiety. One is left to ask, why people are so concerned about this topic today. Perhaps the answer to this question lies in the fact that all the philosophers consider that ‘unhomely’ environments may lead to the negative expression of anxiety resulting in its expression as anxiety disorders. One is left to question if there is something ‘unhomely’ in contemporary post modern society? Perhaps John McLeod offers some possible answers to this question in *Narrative and Psychotherapy* (2006). McLeod proposes that one of the greatest issues facing society today is the lack of coherent narrative. The collective narrative of traditional society, still in place up until World War I, has been progressively decomposed on the passage through modern and to post-modern society (cf. McLeod 2006:1-27). This implies the need for the construction of a comprehensive individual narrative, as a person’s life has to make sense within its story of self, whether this is individual or communal. Perhaps, it could be considered that a sound narrative whether individual or collect can produce a favorable atmosphere for the development of a resolute Dasein and thus the positive evolution of anxiety.

Paul Valéry’s descriptions of the social dilemma caused by World War I, presented in his letters *Crisis of the Mind* (1919), offers a good exemplification of the destructive unfolding of anxiety when collective narratives are destroyed and individuals one have not yet been constructed. In his letters he considered that the conditions were equally hostile for victors and vanquished as collected narratives on science, class protection and social order had all failed for them. Returning soldiers could not understand their home atmospheres’ which had not been exposed to the

destruction to the same extent. To their surprise, soldiers felt more aligned to their former foes than to rejoicing families:

So many horrors could not have been possible without so many virtues. Doubtless, much science was needed to kill so many, to waste so much property, annihilate so many cities in so short a time; but *moral qualities* in like number were also needed. Are Knowledge and Duty, then, suspect?

[...] An extraordinary shudder ran through the marrow of Europe. She felt in every nucleus of her mind that she was no longer the same, that she was no longer herself, that she was about to lose consciousness, a consciousness acquired through centuries of bearable calamities, by thousands of men of the first rank, from innumerable geographical, ethnic, and historical coincidences.

[...] And in the same disorder of mind, at the summons of the same anguish, all cultivated Europe underwent the rapid revival of her innumerable ways of thought: dogmas, philosophies, heterogeneous ideals; the three hundred ways of explaining the World, the thousand and one versions of Christianity, the two dozen kinds of positivism; the whole spectrum of intellectual light spread out its incompatible colors, illuminating with a strange and contradictory glow the death agony of the European soul. While inventors were feverishly searching their imaginations and the annals of former wars for the means of doing away with barbed wire, of outwitting submarines or paralyzing the flight of airplanes, her soul was intoning at the same time all the incantations it ever knew, and giving serious consideration to the most bizarre prophecies; she sought refuge, guidance, consolation throughout the whole register of her memories, past acts, and ancestral attitudes. Such are the known effects of anxiety, the disordered behavior of mind fleeing from reality to nightmare and from nightmare back to reality, terrified, like a rat caught in a trap (Valery 1962: 24 -25).

Both victorious and vanquished soldiers returning from World War I had to come to terms with the consequences of the destruction of their former way of life. “Victorious” French and English soldiers needed to understand why they felt closer to ordinary German soldiers, than to their commanding generals, feudal lords, priests, or even friends and family at home who were still singing patriotic songs and knitting socks for the romantic war effort.

The terrible events of the trenches, not only physically killed millions, but the anxiety generated by trying to make sense of these had the potential to lead to emotional crisis or shut down. The collective narrative decomposed as concepts related to patriotism, class, education; even science and technology were questioned. The allegory of a frantic mind fleeing from reality to nightmare and back just as a rat runs wildly and without direction, caught in a trap, is a very apt description of anxiety that cannot have a positive solution, but rather mismanaged anxiety becomes a precursor to anxiety disorder. If *Being in the world* is not resolute as in the *unheimlich* atmosphere of post

modern society, anxiety may lead to destruction manifestations such as post traumatic stress, GAD, social phobias and other anxiety disorders. As my work progressed I began to question, if reflective contact with relevant external narratives, i.e. those told in films, could be used to help young people construct an appropriate narrative of self that could prevent the progression of anxiety to anxiety disorders.

Once, I had selected a trait to measure, I then had to choose a specific psychometric tool. Many different psychometric scales have been developed to measure anxiety and Lam *et al.*'s extensive directory *Assessment Scales in Depression, Mania and Anxiety* (2005), offers many examples. However, though many are available, only a few are designed for repeated use over a short period and this is exactly what I wanted to do. There were other conditioning factors also. My scale would also have to be suitable for use in an educational environment and be sufficiently simple both in application and analysis that a non-clinician could use it. These restrictions led me to Charles Spielberger's STAI inventories presented in *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults: Sampler Set Manual, Test Booklet and Scoring Key* (1983). These inventories offer a very clear differentiation between state and trait anxiety with independent definitions and questionnaires for state (SAI) and trait anxiety (TAI). They would permit me to distinguish between volunteers' general outlook on life, and their state anxiety both before and after watching a movie.

I was encouraged to use STAI scales because Spielberger's distinction between SAI and TAI was strongly rooted in past scientific experimentation and theory. Using Robert Cattell's suggestions presented in "Patterns of Change: Measurement in relation to state dimension, trait change, liability and process concepts" (1966) and his own earlier work "Theory and research on anxiety" (1966) and "Anxiety as an emotional state" (1972), Spielberger established principles for distinguishing between state and trait anxiety. In the operational manual *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults: Sampler Set Manual, Test Booklet and Scoring Key* (1983), Spielberger defined TAI as a relatively stable individual anxiety-proneness, a relatively constant feature throughout life reflecting the way people perceive situations as dangerous or threatening generally. Conversely, he proposes that anxiety states are subjective feelings of apprehension, tension, nervousness and worry produced by activation or arousal of the autonomic nervous system. However, he recognizes that while TAI and SAI are separate entities, they still influence each other. He suggests that people respond to potentially threatening situations with different levels of SAI based on their TAI. High TAIers tend

to demonstrate high SAI more frequently than low TAIers, because the former tend to interpret a wider range of situations as potentially dangerous or threatening. However, he still holds that even though they are related, they are still distinct entities as TAI refers to long term perception of danger and SAI to the feeling of momentarily being threatened (*cf.* Spielberg 1983: 4-6).

The questionnaires themselves were thoroughly tested to verify their ability to distinguish between TAI and SAI practically. He and his team used a variety of “before and after” scenarios to establish, on the one hand, the stability of the TAI Y-2 questionnaire in face of varying circumstances and, on the other, the reliability and internal consistence of the SAI Y-1 questionnaire to register changes in state anxiety arising from exposure to these. Situations used to test the questionnaires ability to do just this included preparation for surgery, dental treatment, job interviews, watching films with industrial accident scenes, doing academic tests, physical exercise evaluations (military), meditation and engagement in relaxation techniques. The questionnaires were modified until the outcomes of the practical trials gave Speilberger the repeated consistence he required.

Speilberger’s methods encouraged confidence, as did the results presented. For instance when patients completed the TAI and SAI questionnaires before and after undergoing surgical procedures, state anxiety scores rose immediately before surgery and declined as patients recuperated. However, TAI scores remain relatively constant throughout the whole process. In general SAI scores decreased as a result of relaxation activities and training, while they increased in response to physical danger and psychological stress. Trait results remained stable under the same conditions. (*cf.* 6, 30-31, 48, 69) Thus it can be proposed that the Y1 SAI scale is sensitive to environmental factors, whereas the Y2 TAI scale does not appear to be so.

The fact that the combined STAI questionnaires had been used to establish baselines for repeat trials and registered changes in SAI readings when individuals were exposed to short term stressful or relaxing conditions indicated that they would also be appropriate for use in the film screening trials. Thus, in principle, the STAI questionnaires would permit me to distinguish between an individual’s normal outlook on life and his/her feelings at a particular moment. Therefore, they should offer insight into how volunteers’ anxiety levels reacted to the idea of sitting down to watch a movie and separate this from the reaction to the movie itself.

I was further encouraged in this choice because one of the calibration tests for the SAI questionnaire involved registering changes in SAI levels provoked by watching a documental-type film that exhibited scenes simulating serious injuries in saw mill accidents. This trial registered the greatest increase in SAI of all the stress trials used, with average female SAI shooting up to 60.94/80 from 32.70/80 (*cf.* 44). This result offered clear evidence that viewers' anxiety levels reacted strongly to onscreen events and, that the SAI inventories had the ability to captivate this response. This outcome also suggested that if I wanted to investigate how connecting with movies can reduce anxiety levels, it would be better not to screen films demonstrating images of physical violence during the trials.

The STAI questionnaires have a long history of successful application by non-clinicians in educational environments and the operating methods and grading keys are clearly laid out in the operating manual, the *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults: Sampler Set Manual, Test Booklet and Scoring Key*. The manual provides a sample of the questionnaire and instructions for application that are easy to understand and use. Spielberger produced a simple standard table that established clear categories, which allows for the easy establishment of general groupings. The scales score from a minimum of twenty to a maximum of eighty. Thus they have an active range of sixty points. Respondents that score between 20 and 39 points are considered to demonstrate low anxiety levels, between 40 and 59 medium, and 60 to 80 high anxiety levels. This type of classification made it easy to establish broad categories when working with sample groups. Also, it establishes criteria for respondents which were appropriate for my research. Respondents should be aged fifteen or over and with at least fourth- or fifth-grade reading skills, prerequisites filled by all my target groups. I planned to work with Portuguese high school students, university undergraduates and adult education groups.

However, while psychometric scales offering numeric data, they also have limitations. For instance they do not give indications of causal influences, nor do they explain if respondents are aware of changes in emotional states. Therefore, even though using open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires would place limitations on the number of cases that could be evaluated as they require individual assessment in a way that psychometric scales do not, I added longer questionnaires to the group screenings, in order to obtain information about causal factors, and because I was more interested in knowing the stories behind the figures than producing a statistical analysis of results.

Using self-reporting open answer questions in order to get insight into causal factors is not a new idea. The first large scale study that used this approach was probably Brown and Harris' work carried out in the 1970s and presented in *Social Origins of Depression: A Study of Psychiatric Disorder in Women* (1978). Brown and Harris developed a model of interview with open-answer, self-reporting questions to try to understand potential causal agents that could lead to depression in order to comprehend trends observed in different social classes (*cf.* 46-60). According to Ellen McDaniel's review, "Social Origins of Depression: A Study of Psychiatric Disorder in Women" (1980), Brown & Harris's book offered new and significant insight into causal factors that can lead to depression and its findings were worth consideration by both practitioners and those involved in planning public health programs (*cf.* McDaniel 1980: 570-1). This publication brought a new understanding to the importance of observing what people can report about their feelings under different circumstances and highlighted the advantages of open-answer self-reporting questions.

Another reason that I wanted to extend the base of investigation beyond statistical analysis was that the latter requires the elimination of individual high scoring results and those demonstrating great variance as these disturb the calculation of averages and normal standard deviation being therefore removed from average tables. However, the stories behind results that exhibited very high initial scores and marked subsequent reductions were very relevant to my work as they presented some of the most interesting narratives on how connection with a fictional world can influence a viewer. Therefore although I could not include these cases in the statistical calculation, I refer to them when I analyze the longer answer questionnaires.

I developed four questions for the single trials which in turn would form the core of all the long-answer questionnaires used throughout, with the exception of the second screening of trial seven. As the work progressed and volunteers' answers raised different issues or I sought additional information, I added some new questions. Volunteers answered these questions after they had completed the psychometric questionnaires so as not to interfere with the STAI analysis. The initial four questions were:

1. Pick one of the options and explain a little if you picked B or C

After the film did you feel:

A: the same; Why?

B: more hopeful or better; Why?³

C: worse Why?

2. Did the film remind you of anything about yourself or things that happened to you?
3. What was your favorite part of the film and why?
4. Who was your favorite character?

The first question was an attempt to understand whether volunteers were aware of reductions in anxiety levels if these occurred during the course of the trial. Question two was to encourage viewers to pursue any personal associations between themselves and the movie. I also wanted to see if volunteers who registered large reductions in anxiety readings would write about personal connections. Question three was to encourage volunteers to think selectively about the film, helping them to look for connection points for later analysis or for use with other films. I was also interested in seeing if volunteers would write about personal connections to their favorite scenes. Question four sought to ascertain whether volunteers connected with characters simply because they were played by Hollywood stars, or because the characters themselves had touched them.

In the *Elizabethtown* screening of trials five and six, those four queries became questions 2 through 5, and the questionnaire began with:

1. What thoughts occurred to you while you were watching the movie and immediately after seeing it?

I placed this new question at the beginning because I wanted to know more about viewers' specific reaction to the film itself, both because of the information I had gathered from single group screenings and the results being obtained on the free associative film analysis trials which were taking place at the same time.

These 5 questions became questions 3 to 8 on the questionnaire for trial five's *Say Anything* screening, trial six's *Chocolate* screening and trial seven's *Elizabethtown*

³ I elaborated the questionnaires for trials 1, 2 and 3 in English and asked if volunteers felt "More hopeful" after watching the movie. Because of the change in volunteer group profile from trial 4 onwards the longer answer questionnaire was translated into Portuguese. "More hopeful" was translated into Portuguese as "better" for later trials because local coordinators felt this was a more natural and less ambiguous option in Portuguese.

screening. The first screening of double trials five and six had revealed cases of increases from TAI to SAI-before. I wanted to try to understand if this increase in anxiety level was due to participating in the film screening trial or factors extraneous to this. Therefore I wanted to know more about volunteers' movie watching habits and what the general movie going experience meant to them:

1. What does watching a movie mean to you?
2. How many films do you watch on average each month?

As *Good* was a very different type of film, and I wanted to know how volunteers would classify their reaction to watching an emotionally challenging film, the long-answer questionnaire became:

1. What thoughts occurred to you while you were watching the movie and immediately after seeing it?
2. What was the principal message of the film for you (There is not one right answer to this question I just want your personal opinion)?
3. Was it worth watching the movie? Why?
4. The film was based on a play that was written at the end of the 1970s. Do you think it is still relevant or was it more appropriate at the time?
5. After watching the movie did you feel:
 - a. the same; Why?
 - b. better; Why?
 - c. worse Why?

With question 1, I wanted to get some insight into the kind of thoughts a film like *Good* would stimulate in viewers and questions 2 and 3 aimed at understanding what the experience meant to individual viewers. Question 4 introduced an idea that would require analytical reflection and I felt this would be a good preparation for question 5, which enquires into viewers' emotional states after watching the movie.

All these long answer questionnaires proved to be very useful when trying to determine if volunteers were aware of alterations in their emotional states and they provided a lot of insight into this matter. The open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires also offered the advantage of adaptability as, they could were modified to investigate

phenomena that group film screenings revealed and so offered the ability to fine-tune the investigation as the work progressed. I was able to add new questions as the ongoing screening introduced unexpected and unforeseen questions to the debate. However, except in the case of the last screening where a very different type of film was viewed, the core questions were always the same for the sake of consistency and coherence.

However, there were some problems associated with using the STAI questionnaires, in particular the commercialization, publication and translation policies associated with them. The questionnaires and manuals are commercialized through the Mind Garden Corporation and covered by strict licensing and copyright regulations. The licensing agreement restricts the reproduction of the questionnaires and only allows the reproduction of five sample questions in research publications as indicated by the company email I received after buying the questionnaires and license to reproduce and use them: “Five sample items from this instrument [State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults] may be reproduced for inclusion in a proposal, thesis, or dissertation.” (Jaimez: 2009) Therefore, when reviewing the results in a written research project like this one, readers do not have access to the whole range of questions on the questionnaires. However, to give an idea of the queries used and the response formats available I will add two sample questions from the Y1-SAI and Y2-TAI questionnaires⁴.

Below are two questions that appear on the Portuguese versions of the SAI- state questionnaires used:

STAI – Y1 – como se sente agora ou seja neste preciso momento	NADA	UM POUCO	MAIS ou MENOS	MUITO
1. Sinto-me calmo/a.				
18. Sinto-me confuse/a.				

⁴ University College London offers researchers the opportunity to look at a version of the STAI questionnaires that they produced for this purpose and present on the web page “Standard Psychology Instruments and Questionnaires” (n/a, n/d). However, they advise that the questionnaires are not recommended for use in the modified format available because this does not follow all the original specification. They inform researchers that the questionnaires on their site are only presented to give an idea of the original formats and that they use “photocopies of original questionnaire in our experiments”.

Below, are two questions that appear on the Portuguese versions of the TAI – trait anxiety questionnaires:

STAI – Y2 – como se sente habitualmente	QUASE NUNCA	ALGUMAS VEZES	FREQUENTE-MENTE	QUASE SEMPRE
1. Sinto-me bem.				
20. Quando penso nas minhas preocupações actuais e actividades, fico tenso/a ou agitado/a.				

Mind Garden Inc. restricts access to all the material it sells, not even permitting researchers to view questionnaires in limited formats to evaluate the appropriateness of the products for specific use. All manuals and questionnaires have to be bought before they can be examined. Therefore, I purchased the original English operating manual, *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults Sampler Set: Manual, Test Booklet and Scoring Key* (1983), complete with sample questionnaires, from the official site. I evaluated the method and its theoretical support and considered this appropriate. I then did some small preparatory experiments to see if I was able to use the questionnaires appropriately and if they would work with Portuguese subjects. These went well so, I decided to use the questionnaires.

However, when I accessed the site to buy the Portuguese translation, I was only given the option to buy the original English version with a free Portuguese translation. Mind Garden exhibit a certain ambiguity about the translated versions of the questionnaires they offer because, the site clearly states that Mind Garden take no responsibility for the quality and accuracy of translations and even warns that some translations are not complete⁵. Because of Mind Garden’s warning, and due to the fact that I could not verify the quality of the translation without buying this, I sought translations that were being used successfully in Portugal. On the single group screening

⁵ Below is the extract from the Mind Garden site referring to their responsibility about translations:

We [Mind Garden Inc] offer no warranty or assurance of quality for these translations. The translations listed are of varying quality; many are done by individual researchers. While most of the translations are complete, some are only partial. Some contain versions from multiple translators. Very few have validation data. Most buyers are satisfied with what they receive and are pleased we do not charge extra for them.

I acknowledge that I will receive the translation free with the purchase of the English version. I understand the limitations outlined in the above paragraph.

trials, I used these together with the original English version following the guidelines from the *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults: Sampler Set Manual, Test Booklet and Scoring Key* (1983). I always used the original English questionnaire to explain the meanings of the questions. When I had completed the single screenings, I sought assistance in interpreting the data obtained and entered in contact with Professor Danilo Silva at the Faculty of Psychology, University of Lisbon, who I learned was one of the leading experts on the use of the STAI questionnaires in Portugal.

When I met Professor Silva, he was greatly surprised at the translation I was using and Mind Garden's comments on the quality and validation of translations as he and his team had translated and calibrated the questionnaires for use in Portugal. In fact, his translation and calibration data are available in *Manual do Inventário de Estado-Traço de Ansiedade: STAI* (Silva & Spielberger: 2007), a publication co-authored by Silva and Spielberger. Unfortunately these can only be accessed if one uses the web address complete with the link to the Portuguese translation, <http://www.mindgarden.com/products/staip.htm>. Alternative, one has to place the phrase "Inventário de Estado-Traço de Ansiedade para Adultos" in an online search engine. Although the link to this translation is hosted on the Mind Garden site, it cannot be found unless it is accessed directly and is impossible to find it unless one previously knows it actually exists.

Discovering these official translations left me in a difficult situation. Should I start all over again and disregard the results obtained from the original single screening trials? Unfortunately, this was not really an option as it would have been very difficult or impossible to work with these groups again as some had since been disbanded. Also, because of the warning on the Mind Garden site, I had always explained the questions on the questionnaires referring to the original English version and used this to answer volunteers' questions or clarify interpretations, moreover when comparing the translated versions of the questionnaires, it became clear that all the questions on the SAI questionnaires were very similar, the differences presented were due to mere alterations in wording. For instance, question 7 on the Y1-SAI questionnaire, I used initially was worded as follows: "Presentemente, preocupo-me com possíveis desgraças", whereas the official questionnaire asked the same question in the following manner: "Estou actualmente preocupado/a com possíveis desgraças". I consider that both are appropriate translations for the original English question: "I am presently worrying over possible misfortunes."

The questions on the TAI questionnaire were also very similar, except in the case of one question. The operating manual permits the inclusion of questionnaires where one or two questions have not been answered, if an average value based on the overall results obtained from the other answers is added to the final value. Thus, I disregarded the answer to the question that was different and calculated the result of this questionnaire using average values obtained from the other answers. This readjustment did not influence the trends that had been observed during the screenings. Therefore, for all these reasons, I decided to maintain these results.

However, to avoid confusion or taint the experiments I decided to process the data from the single and double trials separately. In practical terms this worked quite well as I was looking at slightly different issues in each type of trial. Also, though I followed the general patterns established for the division and analysis of sex and age groups, I refer to Silva's average tables, merely to offer a grounding reference and not to make direct comparisons. Moreover, because I was more interested in understanding the stories behind the figures and the causal factors that might lead to change, I added open-answer self-reporting questionnaires to the trials. This addition would mean that my sample size would be too small for statistical analysis anyway.

Therefore, the STAI results were only processed to give indications of trends and tendencies associated with the movie going experience. I used Silva's average values as benchmark references to establish categories for analysis and to verify that values fit within generally acceptable patterns.

3.1 Working with volunteer groups

All the group film screenings were carried out in Portuguese educational environments. Participants ranged from high school students aged between 16 and 19 years of age, university undergraduates aged between 19 and 48 and members of adult education student groups aged between 18 and 55. Volunteer groups varied in size from five to forty members. All had male and female participants, though generally there were more female volunteers. Finally, around 120 volunteers participated in more than 200 screenings. It is difficult to give exact numbers for volunteers because in the double trials some volunteers participated in two screenings. Some used assumed names that they might have changed from one screening to the other. Therefore, in the double screenings, I will refer to the number of screenings rather than volunteers. This chapter is necessarily longer than the others because it includes comprehensive documented results from all the group screenings. This section could have been presented in two separate chapters. However, the methods used on all the group screenings were actually very similar and the second section builds on the first. Therefore, I considered one long chapter was the most reasonable way of presenting the results obtained.

The work with the trials began long before I actually met the students. First, I had to find groups to work with. Gleaning from Robert Waxler's programs, I sought teachers who were passionate about cinema and literature and who felt that these could influence their students' lives positively. I had initially planned to work with undergraduate university students, and I did this in trial one. However, curricular constraints and the difficulty of obtaining suitably sized volunteer groups made this an unviable option. Thereafter I turned to adult education centers and secondary schools as I felt that these could provide suitably sized volunteer groups. Through reading programs in libraries, extracurricular high school programs in cultural centers and graduate literature courses, I encountered teachers who were interested in the project. Six helped me perform the trials in their schools and became local coordinators.

They were psychology and Portuguese language teachers working in adult education centers as well as philosophy, psychology, art and Portuguese language & literature teachers working in regular secondary schools. Their participation and cooperation in the project was vital as it could not have proceeded without their active involvement. They accompanied the trials through the bureaucratic processes and their practical application. In the case of secondary school and adult education groups they

presented the project to school boards for official approval. In secondary schools the project also had to be presented to parents and guardians for approval through homeroom teachers. All under-age secondary school students who participated in the trials, as part of school activities, did so with parental authorization.

I also had to decide what films to show these students. As indicated in the introduction, I looked for films telling contemporary and relevant “simple stories” that could speak to young people today as Beecher-Stowe’s, Twain’s and Dickens’ literary works had done for earlier generations. I wanted films with coherent and relevant narratives that would permit volunteers to interact with them easily. Holland’s significant associative analysis to popular films like Michael Curtiz’s *Casablanca* (1942) and John Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) demonstrated that films appearing to be “pieces of fluff” can achieve significant purposes. It did not matter if the format was simple, a piece of “literature of escape”, what mattered was that viewers could connect and interact with them freely. As humor often facilitates interaction with audiences they could include this as well. Because of the reactions to the filmed saw mill scenes used in the STAI calibration trials, I decided at the outset to avoid films with images of explicit physical violence.

Following the deliberations laid out in the introduction and discussion with friends, colleagues and local coordinators, an initial panel of five films was selected. From a personal perspective, I wanted to include *Elizabethtown* because I felt it told the kind of simple story that I was looking for and also because of the results of my free associative film analysis to it. The final panel consisted of Cameron Crowe’s *Say Anything* (1989) and *Elizabethtown* (2005), Clint Eastwood’s *Letter’s of Iwo Jima* (2006), David Lynch’s *The Straight Story* (1991) and Lasse Haalstrom’s *Chocolate* (2000).

All tell simple stories, with coherent narratives emphasizing the importance of strong and genuine relationships. They demonstrate success and failure as relative values, dependant on individual life priorities and principles, not standard scales. They contrast living as opposed to going through the motions of life and exemplify how lives can be blighted when people are too concerned with “keeping up appearances”, following established social convention and not seeking self awareness. There is humor, good sound tracks (especially in the Cameron Crowe movies) and positive if alternative outcomes. Though in practical terms, there was never a male/female prevalence when films were chosen, *Letter’s of Iwo Jima* and *The Straight Story* were added because the

selection group felt that they would appeal more to male audiences, while the others were considered more of a female preference.

From the initial selection *Chocolate* and *Say Anything* and *Elizabethtown* were chosen. Older viewers, who had grown up (and were still living) in rural environments, enjoyed *Chocolate* very much. They commented that they could relate to the daily circumstances and community issues portrayed in the film. *Elizabethtown* proved to be a favorite with other groups. In the final double trial I wanted to see how volunteers' anxiety levels would be influenced by a challenging film. Therefore, I showed Vicente Amorin's *Good* (2008) to a group that had reacted very positively to *Elizabethtown*.

In practical terms, once teachers decided to support the project, we discussed the film to propose to students and/or school boards. One or two movies were normally chosen from the initial five pre-selected choices. For instance, trial one's local coordinator suggested screening *Elizabethtown* after I explained the results of my free associative writing to it. She was curious to see how her students would react. Nevertheless, she felt that her students would respond better to the trial if they thought that they had participated in the choice of the movie. Therefore, she suggested offering *Elizabethtown* and *The Straight Story* at the beginning of the trial. The group chose *Elizabethtown* because none of them had seen it before and their teacher had talked to them about both films and they preferred this one.

The local coordinator responsible for trials two and three requested *Elizabethtown* for trial two. Participants on this trial were unemployed adults finishing an adult education retraining program. He wanted to show them a film that transmitted a message of hope. He recommended *Chocolate* for trial three volunteers because of participants' ages and background; employed adults attending an evening adult education program. However, he suggested that I allow this group to choose between *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate*. They selected *Chocolate* as they felt they would relate more to the story. Trial four's local coordinator selected *Elizabethtown* for her group.

Trial five was the first double trial. Because of the class profile, their teacher wanted to show her students films that could help to reduce anxiety levels. Therefore, we decided to begin this double trial screening *Elizabethtown*, as it had proved efficient in reducing anxiety levels in previous trials. We choose the other Cameron Crowe movie *Say Anything* for the second screening as it has a similar profile and is the work of the same director, even if the narrative format was different and *Say Anything* following a more conventional structure than *Elizabethtown* which "begins with an

ending and ends with a beginning” (Crowe 2005a: vii). They both used comprehensively drawn, likable characters who shared the same type of free flowing dialogues while exploring significant issues deferentially but humorously. We also felt *Say Anything* would be interesting for this group as the story revolving around final year high school students reflects a similar reality to that of this group. However, though it was made quite recently, it is situated before the digital age of laptop computers, social networks and cellular phones. The film offers an interesting portrayal of how habits have changed so radically over such a short time

Participants in trial six had much in common with the volunteers in trial three. I wanted to see how the same group would react to *Chocolate* and *Elizabethtown* as I had observed similarities in some results and differences in others during the initial single trial when different groups watched these films. Local coordinators agreed to this idea though they expected participants to react more positively to *Chocolate*, because they felt their students might not engage easily with *Elizabethtown*'s executive, yuppy American tale.

Finally in trial seven I wanted to see if watching emotionally challenging movies, without explicit onscreen violence, would lead to increased state anxiety levels. Volunteers watched two movies, *Elizabethtown* to offer a reference point and *Good*. This last film demonstrates the consequences of lack of reflection and shows how a good man can permit terrible things to happen. The hero allows his prior work to be exploited by the Nazi propaganda machine, which uses it to justify very evil purposes because he is dazzled by the rewards and success his collaboration offers him and he is afraid to make a stand. I chose this movie because though it is a challenging movie, portraying brutal times, there is little visual onscreen violence.

In this chapter the results of the psychometric questionnaires are first presented to demonstrate how watching the particular films shown during the screening affected volunteers' state anxiety levels. Then the outcomes from the psychometric scales are cross referenced with volunteers' longer answers on the open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires. The latter enquired into participants' feelings about cinema in general and the specific experience of watching the movie screened during the psychometric trial. The purpose of this triangulation of results is to determine if alterations registered in anxiety levels during the trials are reflected in volunteers' appreciation of how the experience influenced their emotional state and thus to establish if participants are aware, at a conscious level, of the alterations registered by the psychometric scales.

The outcomes are presented in two sections because, as the work progressed, the direction of enquiry modified in accordance with the results obtained in ongoing work. Section one presents the results of trials 1, 2, 3 and 4 together and looks at how watching a single movie telling a simple story with a positive if alternative outcome influenced volunteers' anxiety levels and feelings. Three groups selected and watched *Elizabethtown* and one *Chocolate*. General alterations in anxiety levels are identified from the STAI results and these are reviewed in light of the volunteers' longer answers. This analysis offered insight into how watching a particular film affected volunteers' state anxiety levels and insight into factors that facilitated participants' awareness of these changes. The initial single trials demonstrated harmony of results in some parameters but dissonance in others.

For this reason, section two is dedicated to the three double screenings trials to determine how the same volunteers would react to watching two different movies. In trials five and six, volunteer groups watched two similar movies, while the participants on trial seven watched different types of films. *Elizabethtown* and *Say Anything* were screened on trial five to see if volunteers' anxiety levels and emotional states would react in a comparable fashion when they watched similar movies with related signatures. *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate*, the two movies used in the single screening trials were used on trial six to see if trends observed in the single screenings would be repeated when the same volunteers watched both films. Volunteers on trial seven watched two different types of movies: *Elizabethtown*, with its uplifting message and positive ending and *Good*, which questions attitudes and behaviors and is confrontational and disconcerting. The purpose was to compare how watching these different types of films would affect anxiety levels and emotional states.

As in the single screening trials, the results from the STAI questionnaires are first analyzed and compared to responses to longer answer questionnaires at the end of each screening. The outcomes obtained from the two screenings will be placed alongside each other to see if the trends observed in the single trials are maintained in the double trial. Therefore, STAI results are again compared with outcomes from long answer questionnaires at the end of each screening and these outcomes are also subsequently compared.

3.1.1 Procedures on the day of the screening

Local coordinators were normally present during the actual trial. They introduced me to the group and were active in the general debate. This introductory part of the trial normally lasted between twenty and twenty-five minutes because though a number of issues had to be discussed, it was also important to maintain the interest of the audience. We began by discussing movies in general and the kinds of films volunteers liked to watch. Then they selected the movie they wanted to watch during their trial when this was an option or I presented the film that had been chosen for them.

As the STAI questionnaires evaluate volunteers' anxiety levels we discussed this topic and their understanding using the concepts presented earlier. After a general discussion on anxiety, I explained the difference between state and trait anxiety according to Spielberg's model. Then we talked about psychometric scales in general and STAI in particular. I assured volunteers that their questionnaires would be treated confidentially and the data related to each trial would be identified by an algorithm, as can be verified in the tables and graphs presented. I informed them that they could identify themselves using a nickname if this made them feel more comfortable, they just needed to indicate their correct age and sex and be consistent in the use of pseudo name. Some wanted to know their anxiety scores after completing the trial. Therefore, I informed them that if they wanted this information, they would need to use their real names and bring a photo ID to the feedback session.

I followed the procedures laid out in the application manual *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults Sample Set – Manual, Test Booklet and Scoring Key* (1983), both for administration of the questionnaires and analysis of data. According to recommendations, I circulated the Y1-SAI questionnaire first emphasizing that it inquires about how the individual is feeling at the time of questioning, again referring to the differences between SAI and TAI as Spielberg had defined them (4-5). I read the questions aloud emphasizing that answers should reflect how volunteers were feeling at that precise moment in time. I answered questions about their interpretation assuring volunteers that there was no right or wrong answer and told them that the answers were not always weighted in the same order. When all general questions were answered, volunteers began to fill in the questionnaire. I instructed them to raise their

hands if they any questions occurred to them as they did this. I or their local coordinator (who was also familiar with the questionnaire) would go to them to avoid disturbing or influencing other participants. I was always careful to ensure that volunteers were sitting in such a manner that they could not easily see their colleagues' answers and they were not allowed to speak to each other when completing the questionnaires. Procedures normally ran smoothly and volunteers filled out the questionnaires within the time frame indicated by the manual (about five minutes for each questionnaire).

Once all volunteers had completed Y1 SAI questionnaires, Y2 TAI questionnaires were distributed. I repeated the aforementioned procedure, reviewing the questions but in this case drawing attention to the fact that this inventory focuses on volunteers' general emotional states. Once all participants had answered the questionnaires, we watched the movie. Some trials had an interval during the movie, others did not. I was flexible on this point allowing the group and local coordinators to decide at the beginning of each trial whether they wanted an interval during the screening. However, there was never an interruption between the end of the viewing and completing final Y1 SAI and open-answer self-reporting questionnaires.

In the latter, some participants wrote very little, others nothing, but quite a few wrote extensively and personally. I was surprised by the originality, variety and intensity of responses provoked by watching the films. After completing the questionnaires, we discussed the film and I answered any questions they had about it or the project in general. Each trial lasted on average three hours.

The data from trials 1-4 will be presented together below in section one, double trials five, six and seven will be presented individually in section two. As the data for the first four trials will be processed together, I will give a brief description of the circumstances of each individual trial at this point to provide some background information. Trials five, six and seven will be processed individually and as such will be presented at the beginning of each section.

Trial 1 occurred on the 19th of March 2009 from 2.00 to 5.00 p.m. in Lisbon. Seven undergraduate students of both sexes volunteered to participate in it. It took place in a classroom that had been prepared with a computer and video projector to screen the movie. The classroom was comfortable; sound and image quality was acceptable. The class teacher had prepared students for the trial but was unable to accompany it. The results obtained are reported as D1 through D7.

Trials 2 and 3 both took place on the 15th of June 2009 in an adult education centre in a small city in rural Portugal. Trial 2 ran from 2.00 to 5.00 p.m. and trial 3 from 7.30 to 10.30 p.m. The trials occurred in the students' regular classrooms. A computer and video projector was used in trial 2, a TV and DVD player in trial 3. The classrooms were comfortable; sound and image conditions were reasonable. Both groups had the same local coordinator, who had presented the project to them and encouraged them to participate actively in it. He presented me to the groups and remained throughout the complete trials. Eleven unemployed adults of both sexes on the final week of an 18-month IT re-training program participated in trial 2. Their results are reported as B1 through B11. Trial 3 was completed by eight working adults taking part in a night 12th grade equivalence program. Their results are registered as BC1 through BC8.

Finally, trial 4 took place on the 18th November 2009 from 3.00 to 6.00 p.m. Twenty-eight 12th grade students aged between sixteen and nineteen participated in this trial. It was promoted by their psychology teacher as an extra-curricular activity associated with this subject. The screening took place in the cinema theatre of the local cultural center on the students' free afternoon. The local coordinator accompanied the trial throughout and participated in it also. Their results are posted as C1 through C28.

3.2 Single screening trials

In all fifty-four volunteers aged between 16 and 47 from various educational backgrounds participated in the four screenings, which took place in Lisbon and small towns and cities in rural areas. The initial objective of the trials was to determine first, if viewers' state anxiety levels after watching a movie would differ significantly from their more constant trait/biological anxiety levels, especially because standard tables as can be seen below indicate that under neutral conditions trait and state anxiety levels are generally similar in Portugal (Silva & Spielberger 2007). Second, reviewing volunteers' longer questionnaires I wished to investigate if volunteers were aware of changes in anxiety levels if these occurred.

	Male high school	Female high school	Male university students	Female university students	Male adults	Female adults
Y1 – SAI Average	36,95	39,49	37,91	38,78	35,58	37,75
Standard Deviation	9,53	9,68	8,53	9,39	9,95	9,71
Y2 – TAI Average	37,83	40,16	38,55	39,68	34,84	38,01
Standard Deviation	9,54	9,11	8,66	8,25	8,59	8,85
	Male 18-39	Female 18-39	Male 40-49	Female 40-49	Male 50 Or over	Female 50 or over
Y1 – SAI Average	35,78	37,01	35,61	36,68	35,20	38,06
Standard Deviation	8,70	9,50	8,90	10,07	8,42	9,52
Y2 – TAI Average	34,78	36,93	34,64	38,71	35,11	39,42
Standard Deviation	8,13	8,37	8,95	8,67	8,96	9,82

(Silva & Spielberger 2007: 16-18)

When Silva and his team carried out the calibration trials for the SAI and TAI questionnaires, these were completed at the same time and under neutral circumstances. The tables indicate a high degree of correspondence between state and trait anxiety under neutral conditions. In Silva & Spielberger's table both TAI and SAI scores are generally higher for females than males, with high school girls and women over 50

scoring highest TAI in the respective tables. Interestingly, all the averages fall within the “Low Anxiety” category except the high school girls’ trait average (40.16), which just nudges into the “Medium Anxiety” grouping. The standard deviation values point to a considerable spread among standardized samples, indicating that most regular students and adults would score between 30 and 45.

Silva table is based on the following sample sizes. In keeping with Spielberger’s model Silva created three large categories for data analysis: male & female high school students, male & female university students and male & female adults as the table below indicates. The high school student average was based on a sample of 403 boys and 432 girls aged between 15 and 18 and studying in the greater Lisbon area and surrounding cities. 410 female and 276 male university students aged between 18 and 25 participated in the university undergraduate sample. 1,484 men and women aged between 18 and 69 made up the adult group. The adult categories are further divided into three subcategories, 18 – 39 year olds, 40 – 49 year olds and over 50s.

When processing the data obtained in the single film screening, I followed Silva’s subdivision as closely as possible for adult volunteers. Silva & Spielberger created 2 wide adult categories 20 to 39 year-olds and 40 to 49 year-olds (*cf.* Silva & Spielberger 2007: 16-18). As I had very few volunteers over 40, I only calculated included adults in the 20 to 40 year-old category in the average calculation. However, the STAI results of these volunteers over 40 years of age are included in the table the complete individual results and in the general discussion, even if they are excluded from the calculation of the averages. When it came to high school and university students I had seven university students. I placed all university students aged 18 and 19 in the high school student category and over 20s in the appropriate adult class. In the Portuguese reality when military recruits were observed 17-20 year olds were included in the same category (*cf.* Silva & Spielberger 2007: 22). In the double trials presented in section two, in order to simplify the presentation I placed all the results in trial six into the wide adult category. In trial five and seven volunteers fit easily into the high school student category.

As the TAI and SAI questionnaires would permit checking alterations from trait to state anxiety levels, I decided to gauge if individual volunteer’s state anxiety before watching a film was similar to their TAI by contrasting results obtained from the Y-2 TAI questionnaires and the Y-1 SAI questionnaires completed before watching the movie. I hoped this would indicate how the viewers’ anxiety levels were influenced by

the prospect of watching a movie. Then I compared the two SAI Y-1 questionnaires filled in before and after watching the film to determine how viewers reacted to the films themselves. I felt this would give a stronger overall picture of how viewers' anxiety levels are affected by the whole movie going experience. The complete results are presented in four tables in the pages to follow.

From the very first STAI trial, significant reductions in anxiety levels were registered. In fact, of the 54 volunteers who participated in the trials, only 4 registered minor increases. I wanted to compile some form of standardized table to identify generalized trends. It was recommended that I calculate median values, but some groups were composed of such limited samples and there was such a degree of variance between individual results that the difference between central individual could be very large, I considered that median values would not really be representative of the sample. Therefore, I decided to produce simple averages for age and sex categories according to Silva and Spielberg's models. Excessively high scores or those ineligible for age reasons were eliminated. Two results were removed because of high readings and three others because they fell outside the age categories. Therefore, table 1 and graphs 1 and 2 were produced from a sample of 49 volunteers whose results fit within the age and scoring parameters, independent of their individual trends.

Graph 1 Single Film Screening Trials: Anxiety Readings registered before and after watching *Elizabethtown* or *Chocolate*

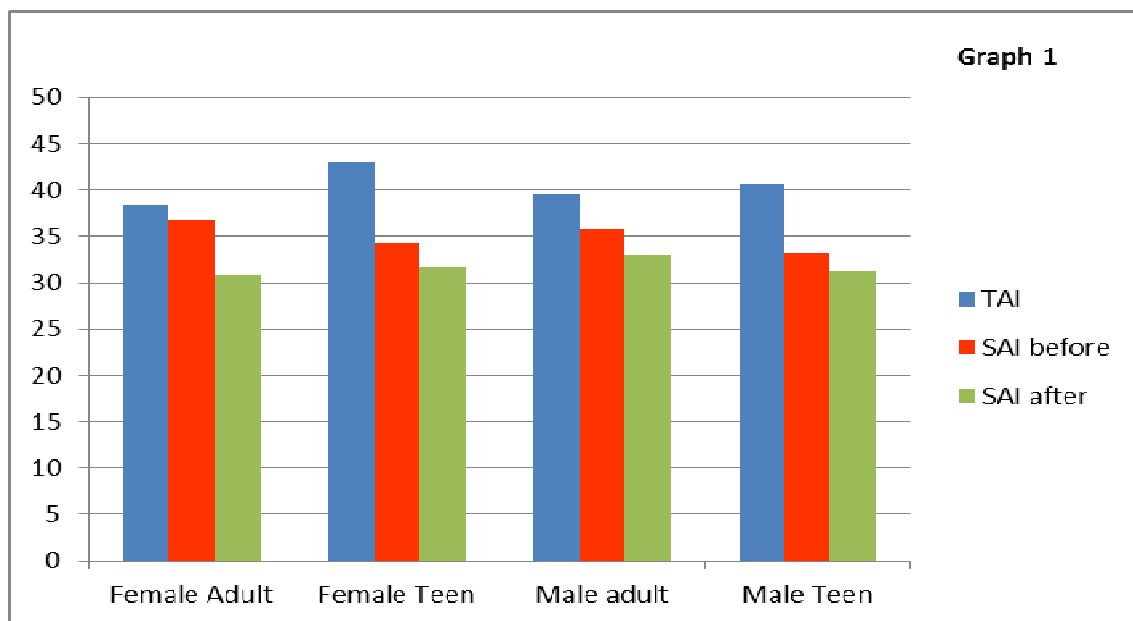


Table and graph 1 show a consistent reduction in anxiety level across the trial. However, the result that surprised me most was that in all categories, except female

adults, the most marked average reduction occurs between TAI and SAI-before. It must also be noted that in the categories where great reductions occurred from TAI to SAI-before, SAI continued to drop but to a lesser extent during the screening.

Perhaps not surprisingly, reduction in anxiety levels at the anticipation of watching a movie is particularly noticeable in the case of male and female teens, where average anxiety reduces by 7.5 and 8.7 points respectively. SAI readings for males drop by a further 2 points after watching *Elizabethtown*; while female teen values drop by a further 2.7 points. Therefore the overall reduction from TAI to SAI-after viewing a movie for female teens stands at 11.5 points (on a 60 point active scoring range, this value represents a 19.2% decrease). Overall reduction for male teens stands at 9.5 points (15.8%).

Table 1 - Single Film Screening Trials: Anxiety Readings registered before and after watching *Elizabethtown* or *Chocolate*

	Female Adult n=10	Female Teen n=22	Male adult n= 8	Male Teen n=9
TAI	38.4	43.0	39.6	40.7
SAI bef	36.7	34.3	35.8	33.2
SAI after	30.8	31.5	33.1	31.2

Male adults registered a lesser overall reduction and followed a slightly modified pattern. There was a 3.8 point drop from TAI to SAI-before, followed by a further 2.7 point drop in SAI-after. Thus, though the greatest reduction occurs in the first stage of the trial, a closely related level is obtained in the second stage. An overall decrease of 6.5 points (10,8%) is registered in anxiety readings from TAI to SAI during the course of the trial. Female adult average reduction follows a different pattern. The reduction from TAI to SAI-before is just 1.7 points, followed by a marked 5.9 point drop from SAI-before to SAI-after. Total reduction stands at 7.6 points (12.6%). However, for female adults watching the movie is responsible for the greatest reduction.

Curiously the females, teens and adults, are at the two extremes of the spectrum. Female teens registered the highest overall reduction on anticipation of watching a movie and female adults the lowest. I wondered if the circumstances of the trials might have affected this or even the film viewed. Many of the adult women had watched *Chocolate* after a days' work and preparing the family evening meal, while the teens had all watched *Elizabethtown* during the day, even when the screening was an

extracurricular activity. However, even if this is the case, the movie going experience proved to be relaxing, because the SAI-after average registered at the end of the trial is significantly lower.

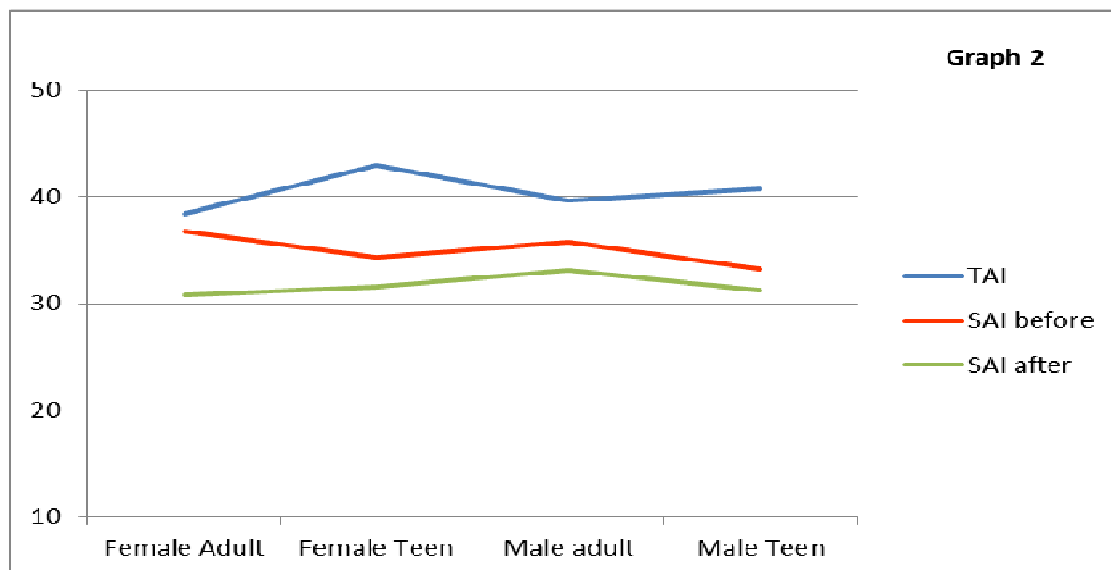
Standard average STAI figures

Scale	Male high school students	Female high school students	Male 18-39	Female 18-39
Average State Anxiety	36,95	39,49	35,78	37,01
Average Trait Anxiety	37,83	40,16	34,78	36,93

(Silva & Spielberger: 16)

Although, I was only using Silva's table as benchmark references because of the constraints of my sample due to size, variance and also because the translation used in this section was not identical to Silva's one, I was pleased to observe that the trial figures are not too distant from Silva's standardized averages. In general the TAI trial figures are just a few points higher than Silva's averages, except for the female adults, where the trial value is actually a few decimals below Silva's averages. When one considers the standard deviation values of Silva's averages, all the figures are within the limits he established. The SAI-before scores are slightly lower than Silva's SAI averages, except for the male adult trial average which is the same as Silva's. The SAI-after values are always significantly lower. It is interesting to observe that independent of initial variance, there is considerable harmony in the SAI-after readings, which are the lowest and most constant across all categories as can be clearly seen in graph 2:

Graph 2 – Single Film Screening Trials: Changes in anxiety levels across age and sex categories



Therefore, one can conclude independently of age or sex, state anxiety levels before watching a movie are lower than trait levels measured under exactly the same circumstances. The lowest level of all is state anxiety after watching a movie like *Elizabethtown* or *Chocolate*.

However, when one looks at the individual questionnaires that produced these averages, it is easy to see that the apparently harmonious patterns are derived from very different individual reduction models. I register the volunteers' STAI results in the table in the sequence: SAI-before, TA and SAI-after because following Spielberg and Silva's instruction, volunteers completed the questionnaires the Y1-SAI questionnaire in this order. Therefore, the presentation in the table acts as a reminder of the manner in which the work is carried out in practically. However, later when I refer to individual STAI results they will be reported in a TAI, SAI-before, SAI-after sequence, e.g. C23 (46: 30: 24) because the TAI value was generally the highest, SAI before was lower and SAI after was lower still. The first table presented is the teen female table, which has volunteers from trial one and four. *Elizabethtown* was the film screened on both trials.

Table 2 – Single Film Screening Trials: Teen Female Individual Anxiety Readings registered before and after watching *Elizabethtown*.

No	Sex	Age	SA before	TA	SA after	Volunteer description of feelings at the end of the trial	Reference in Appendix ⁶
C1	F	17	41	47	42	Better	(Ap:52)
C2	F	17	49	46	35	Better	(Ap:52)
C3	F	16	28	33	25	Better	(Ap:53)
C4	F	17	37	44	25	Better	(Ap:53)
C5	F	17	32	40	34	Better	(Ap:54)
C7	F	17	32	47	28	The same	(Ap:55)
C8	F	16	33	41	34	Better	(Ap:55)
C9	F	17	38	39	27	Better	(Ap:56)
C10	F	17	39	49	39	Better	(Ap:56)
C12	F	17	33	51	31	The same	(Ap:57)
C13	F	17	40	45	38	Worse	(Ap:58)
C14	F	17	37	43	36	Better	(Ap:58)
C16	F	17	25	29	25	Better	(Ap:59)
C17	F	17	36	49	28	Better	(Ap:60)
C18	F	17	31	42	37	Better	(Ap:60)
C19	F	18	27	33	24	Better	(Ap:61)
C23	F	18	30	46	24	Better	(Ap:63)
C24	F	17	28	51	34	Worse	(Ap:63)
C 25	F	18	35	41	36	Better	(Ap:64)
C28	F	17	38	40	35	Better	(Ap:65)
D4⁷	F	19	51	59	45	More hopeful	(Ap:39)
D5	F	19	32	46	25	More hopeful	(Ap:40)

⁶ The appendix references are to volunteers' long answer questionnaires only because the licensing agreement with Mind Garden Inc does not permit the reproduction of the STAI questionnaires in research publications. Filling in the long answer questionnaire was always an optional choice for volunteers, but it was chosen by most performed. However, a few did not as was the case of BC2. When volunteers did not complete the long answer questionnaire I did not digitalize the empty form.

⁷ Excluded from average statistics because of high reading.

As already mentioned the table shows that sometimes the greatest reductions were noted from TAI to SAI-before, sometimes from SAI-before to SAI-after. When examining the individual STAI results I was surprised at the extent and variations in reductions. Looking at the table, it is possible to see that some volunteers like C12 (51; 33; 31) and D5 (46; 32; 25) registered reductions of 14 points or over from one questionnaire/ circumstance to another, followed by lesser reductions in the other circumstance. However, the overall reduction was at least 20 points in each case. Other volunteers scored constant gradual reductions and values were evenly distributed across both questionnaires.

Significantly, while major reductions in state anxiety levels were normally reflected in the volunteers' longer answers, this did not always happen. Some volunteers like C7 (Ap:55) and C12 (Ap:57) with significant reductions in anxiety levels wrote that they felt the same after watching the movie even though they recognized that they had experienced a moment of relaxation. Others like C1 (Ap:52) and C5 (Ap:54) who registered very small changes in anxiety levels wrote they felt better or more hopeful after watching the movie. Often the latter attributed this to the fact that the storyline brought new ways of looking at difficult situations and they had connected positively to this. Still others like C24 (51; 28; 34) wrote they felt worse after watching the movie despite registering a massive 23 point reduction from TAI to SAI-before. Despite a 6 point increase from SAI-before to SAI-after, the latter is still 17 points below TAI. Volunteers' long answers provide a lot of information on causal factors and will be examined in more detail later.

The next table to be presented is the adult female table, which is made up of participants on trials one and two who watched *Elizabethtown* and trial three who watched *Chocolate*. The individual reductions in this category were lower than in the female teen category, so the average reductions were also lower.

Table 3 - Single Film Screening Trials: Adult Female Individual Anxiety Readings registered before and after watching *Elizabethtown* or *Chocolate*

No	Sex	Age	SA bef	TA	SA after	Volunteer description of feelings at the end of the trial.	Reference in Appendix
D7	F	32	31	27	21	More hopeful	(Ap:41)
D1	F	24	48	46	35	More hopeful	(Ap:38)
B1	F	34	30	28	30	The same	(Ap:42)
B3*	F	45	35	41	29	The same	(Ap:43)
B5	F	31	37	46	29	The same	(Ap:44)
B8	F	28	34	42	33	The same	(Ap:45)
B9	F	27	33	31	25	More hopeful	(Ap:46)
BC2 ⁸	F	44	22	21	24	Didn't answer	--
BC3	F	40	36	37	31	The same	(Ap:48)
BC4	F	38	45	57	39	The same	(Ap:49)
BC5	F	31	39	35	33	The same	(Ap:49)
BC8	F	27	33	35	32	The same	(Ap:51)

In this trial many of the volunteers wrote they felt the same after watching the movie including all the participants on the *Chocolate* screening (Ap: 48-51). Still there were cases of significant reduction from TAI to SAI-after as in BC4's case (57; 45; 39). Also, on the *Elizabethtown* screenings there were cases like B9's (31; 33; 25) where the reductions from TAI to SAI-after were not that significant, yet the volunteer wrote that she felt more hopeful after watching the movie. The next table is the male teen table, which is made up of volunteers on trials one and four, all of whom watched *Elizabethtown*.

⁸ Excluded from average statistics because of age

Table 4 – Single Film Screening Trials: Male Teen Individual Anxiety Readings registered before and after watching *Elizabethtown*

No	Sex	Age	SA before	TA	SA after	Volunteer description of feelings at the end of the trial	Reference in Appendix
C6	M	19	38	34	40	The same	(Ap:54)
C11	M	17	30	34	35	Better	(Ap 57)
C15	M	17	31	48	28	Better	(Ap 59)
C 20	M	17	43	49	42	Better	(Ap 61)
C21	M	17	28	28	29	The same	(Ap 62)
C22	M	17	37	46	21	Better	(Ap 62)
C26	M	17	31	37	35	Better	(Ap 64)
C27	M	17	24	44	31	Better	(Ap 65)
D6	M	19	37	46	20	More hopeful	(Ap 40)

As can be seen from this table (and the others) many different realities lay behind the standard average reduction in anxiety levels. Some volunteers like D6 (46; 37; 20) registered an overall decrease from TAI to SAI-after of 26 points, finishing the trial with the lowest possible SAI score of 20 and as would be expected, he wrote that he felt more hopeful after watching *Elizabethtown*. C15 (48; 31; 28) also registered an overall twenty-point reduction and wrote that he felt better after watching the movie. However others, registering lesser decreases and some even slight increases, like C6 (34; 38; 40) still wrote they felt better after watching *Elizabethtown*. In the male teen individual table, three cases of minor overall increase from TAI to SAI-after were recorded, C6, C11 and C21. However, none wrote they felt worse after watching the movie and C6 even wrote that he felt better. The very diverse scenarios led me to conclude that while the movie-going experience might have a generalist effect, it indeed represents a unique experience between viewer and film.

The adult male table which is the next to be presented was made up of volunteers on trials one and two who watched *Elizabethtown* and trial three participants who watched *Chocolate*. As in the case of female adults reductions were lesser here than with teens. No significant increases from TAI to SAI-after were observed either.

Table 5 – Single Film Screening Trials: Male Adult Individual Anxiety Readings registered before and after watching *Elizabethtown* or *Chocolate*

No	Sex	Age	SA bef	TA	SA after	Volunteer description of feelings at the end of the trial.	Reference in Appendix
D3 ⁹	M	47	36	39	32	More hopeful	(Ap:39)
D2	M	27	45	50	35	More hopeful	(Ap 38)
B2 ¹⁰	M	42	40	41	35	More hopeful	(Ap 42)
B4	M	38	43	44	42	More hopeful	(Ap 43)
B6	M	38	31	35	32	More hopeful	(Ap 44)
B7	M	38	32	46	29	More hopeful	(Ap 45)
B10	M	22	48	46	49	More hopeful	(Ap 46)
B11	M	28	33	35	23	More hopeful	(Ap 47)
BC1 ¹¹	M	33	57	64	46	The same	(Ap 48)
BC6	M	30	24	36	22	The same	(Ap 50)
BC7	M	24	30	25	33	The same	(Ap 50)

Curiously, in this table one can see that all the male adult volunteers who watched *Elizabethtown* wrote that they felt better or more hopeful after this experience independently of changes from TAI to SAI-after. On the other hand, all participants on the *Chocolate* screening wrote they felt the same, even when significant reduction from TAI to SAI-after was observed as occurred (BC1 64; 57; 46). These initial findings continued to emphasize the uniqueness of the movie going experience and encouraged me to further investigate volunteers' longer answer questions to look for causal agents that might identify or explain varied reactions.

I observed the results from the STAI and longer answer questionnaires in order to see if I could identify different categories of tendencies. On examination, six general and distinct STAI trends appeared. I resolved to compare data from the open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires to the STAI results according to these categories. These categories do not distinguish between the different trials that produced them. However, before toward the analysis of these, I would like to refer individually to trial two

⁹ Exclude from the production of average statistics because of age.

¹⁰ Exclude from the production of average statistics because of age.

¹¹ Excluded from average statistics because of high readings

because the positive results obtained from it, increased my expectations about the work in general and demonstrated that difficult circumstances could yield positive outcomes.

3.2.1 An exceptional group

I would just like to draw particular attention to the second single screening trial, both because of its circumstances and the outcomes registered. It demonstrated that contact with a relevant film can be significant, when viewers reflect on its significance for them, even on these single screening trials. All the volunteers on this trial were unemployed adults and had grown up and were living in one of Portugal's poorest and least developed provinces. They had left formal education early without high school diplomas.

The local coordinator on this trial, a young Portuguese and English teacher, was passionate about film and literature. He particularly wanted the volunteers on trial two to participate in the project as he hoped that watching and discussing a film like *Elizabethtown* might offer them alternative ways at looking at their very difficult real life situations. Unfortunately, because of scheduling problems, I actually carried out the trial during the last week of classroom training. This was to be followed by a month's placement in a company, after which the program would end. Despite the rather daunting situation, the trial went extremely well and the volunteers embraced the project openly and responded dynamically. The group's behavior would never have indicated that they were not just a regular training group. This trial alerted me to the fact that apparently normal classrooms can hide abnormal situations. Therefore, it alerted me for that fact that when doing group screenings I should be mindful that seemingly ordinary classes might conceal extraordinary difficulties.

After watching *Elizabethtown* all six men and one of the women wrote that they felt more hopeful indicating that this type of contact with a film could affect some lives positively and transmit an alternative perspective to deal with difficult situations. I also learned that this could happen even when there were not very significant reductions in SAI. B4 illustrates this point beautifully. His STAI results (44; 43; 42) only registered a 2-point drop from TAI to SAI-after. However, he still wrote that he felt "More hopeful" at the end of the trial. He ascribed this sensation to the fact that "the film was encouraging and had a strong message". Significantly he added: "To tell the truth I felt renewed after watching it" (Ap: 43). So although there is not a strong reduction in STAI

readings, B4 seemed to connect intimately with *Elizabethtown*. According to his own words, it brought him hope and a renewed perspective on life. His comments and STAI results led me to consider yet again that the contact between movie and viewer is undoubtedly individual and unpredictable. When I read his statement I asked myself, how could such a strong personal statement appear in a trial with such a small change in anxiety level? As the work progressed, I began to see patterns that might explain this reaction.

38 year-old B6 (35; 31; 32) also fits into this category because there is only a 3-point reduction from TAI to SAI-after. Still he also commented that he felt more hopeful after watching *Elizabethtown* “I feel more hopeful because one needs to believe that a positive outcome is possible.” (Ap: 44) The film reminded him of different failures in his life. Claire was his favorite character because she brought meaning back to Drew’s life and the end where love and life prevail was his favorite part of the movie (cf. Ap:44). So neither B4 nor B6’s anxiety levels decreased but connecting personally with the message of the film made them more hopeful and gave them new perspectives.

38 year old B7 also connected personally with *Elizabethtown*, but in his case he scored a significant 17-point reduction from TAI to SAI-after (46; 32; 29). He wrote that he felt more hopeful after watching the film because it made him realize that “sadness doesn’t pay any bills and negative thoughts don’t bring us anywhere.” He connected the story with his unemployment, and wrote that it helped him to look at things differently. His favorite scene was the road trip because it offered a life lesson and made B7 think about his own life. (cf. Ap: 45). 28 year-old B11’s (35; 33; 23) SAI level also reacted very positively to watching *Elizabethtown*. He identified with Drew’s feeling of failure and capacity to survive because of friendship and wrote that he felt more hopeful after watching the film. He wrote that watching it helped him to see a positive side to his present situation of unemployment (cf. Ap:47).

B4 (cf.Ap:43), B7 (cf.Ap:44), B10 (cf.Ap:46) and B11 (cf.Ap:47) all wrote that they felt more hopeful after watching *Elizabethtown*, despite different STAI reactions. These men’s longer answers all imply different but significant individual connections with the ideas transmitted in the movie, and a desire to transfer this into their own living situation leading to an alteration in their state of mind. B4, B7, B10 and B11’s personal statements, especially in light of their real life circumstances, imply that watching *Elizabethtown* and reflecting on it, allowed them to think new thoughts, not only while watching the movie but afterwards also.

All of the men wrote they felt better after watching what many critics classified as a simple romantic comedy. However, only one of the women expressed the same sentiment despite the fact that some, including 31-year old B5, (46; 37; 29) registered large reductions from TAI to SAI-after. B5's state anxiety level demonstrated a similar reduction in anxiety levels at each stage. Nevertheless, she wrote that she felt the same at the end of the trial. However, she acknowledged that it reminded her that we can always live more and enjoy life more (Ap:44). In general, I was curious about the women's responses, B3 (Ap:43) and B8 (Ap:45) both wrote they felt the same after the trial, despite registering respectively a 12 and 9 point decrease from TAI to SAI-after. B3 (41; 35; 29) commented that she had enjoyed the whole movie but it did not remind her of anything that had happened in her own life. Drew was her favorite character. B8 (42; 34; 33) liked the movie and her favorite part was Drew dancing alone as this reminded her of many things. Phil was her favorite character because she felt he offered an excellent exemplification of managerial decline. But although *Elizabethtown* reminded her of many things including a trip she had taken the previous year, she affirmed that felt the same after seeing it.

In general the women who wrote they felt the same at the end of the screening, B3, B5 (Ap:44) and B8 all indicated that they enjoyed watching the movie and experienced significant reductions in anxiety levels. B8 even connected strongly with different physical scenes in the story. These responses seemed to imply that, despite the respite offered by the experience, when the credits come up, the real world problems are still there. Therefore, perhaps the anxiety levels dropped because of the simple relaxation associated with watching a movie, but this is a different matter to believing that one can transfer something from the movie's story into one's real life. I began to wonder if this was the key to the different results registered in the long answer questionnaires and I had these thoughts in mind when comparing the results from the STAI and volunteers' longer answer questionnaires.

3.2.2 Six categories of results obtained

When I reviewed STAI questionnaires, I found that it was impossible to avoid some overlapping and results followed the same tendencies did not always share the same order of magnitude; yet I still managed to identify six principal subcategories. I examined the open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires associated with these groups to see if causal agents could be identified for trends and tendencies. The six were:

1. Cases that followed the general average guidelines i.e. a large reduction from TAI to SAI-before and a continued but lesser reduction from SAI-before to SAI-after.
2. Cases not registered in the average tables because of high readings.
3. Relatively small reductions from TAI to SAI-before, followed by a large reduction in SAI-after.
4. Cases where the SAI-before was higher than the TAI, but where the SAI-after was much reduced.
5. Cases where there was very little change throughout the trial.
6. Cases where there was an increase in SAI-after and/or volunteers wrote that they felt worse after viewing the movie.

3.2.2.1 Overview of Category 1 results:

I looked first at the cases that followed closely the dominant trend established by the trial. However, as mentioned earlier the individual results considered in this category still demonstrate a degree of variance. In this group reduction from TAI to SAI-before always accounted for more than two thirds of the overall reduction. However, even when volunteers followed category one tendencies, they did not accompany these trends on the same numerical scale. A considerable number of volunteers scored overall reductions of over 15 points from TAI to SAI-after, some even registering over 20 points difference in results.

When I studied the long answers according to STAI classifications, to see if parallels could be seen, I discovered that even though connections did appear, each case continued to be individual. Most participants who registered large reductions in STAI

readings during the trials wrote they felt better/more hopeful after watching the movie, but a number wrote that they felt the same at the end of the trial. A cross sectional analysis of the long answers provided some insight into the reasons for these alternative opinions.

For instance, D5 (46; 32; 25), a nineteen year old, female undergraduate who took part in the first trial registered a full 20-point reduction in her anxiety score during the course of the work. She wrote that the film made her feel more hopeful because it showed her how Drew managed to overcome his problems. Claire was her favorite character and she liked the map and the way Claire made Drew come to her. The film did not remind her of anything that had happened to her; yet she connected with the film (*cf. Ap:40*). C17, a seventeen year-old female high school student registered an overall reduction of 21 points (49; 36; 28) from TAI to SAI-after viewing *Elizabethtown*. She also wrote that she felt better after watching the film because it made her reflect on areas of her life where she should have more patience but often does not. It reminded her of things that had happened to her. Her favorite part was when Drew “found” and accepted his life and was reunited with Claire. Drew was her favorite character. C17 appeared to connect with the film and found points of contact with her own life (*cf.Ap:60*).

Eighteen year-old C23 also registered a very large 22 point reduction (46; 30; 24) from TAI to SAI-after and wrote that she felt better after watching the movie. However, she did not attribute this to a personal connection with the movie or new thinking patterns, but because it offered her a time to relax when she did not have to think about anything. C23 chose the road trip where Drew (her favorite character) had time to think about his life and his reencounter with Claire as his favorite sequences. So even though she did not appear to make an intimate connection with the film, nor did it remind her of anything that had happened in her life, watching it reduced her SAI readings to minimal values and her longer answers indicate that she is aware of this change (*cf.Ap:63*). C23’s long answers indicate awareness of her own changed emotional state, but she offers a different reason, it helped her to relax, for feeling better after watching the movie.

38 year old B7 (46; 32; 29) wrote that he felt more hopeful after watching the film because it helped him to get a different perspective on life (*cf.Ap:45*). However, his female colleagues who fit into the same STAI category, 45year old B3 (41; 35; 29) and 28 year-old female B8 (42; 34; 33) both wrote they felt the same after the trial (*cf.*

Ap:42, 45). And their longer answers referred to earlier in the chapter demonstrate that though they enjoyed the movie, they did not think its story could have any reflection on their real lives. On the other hand, 17 year-old C14 (43; 37; 36) and 18 year-old C25 (41; 35; 36) registered the same trends as B3 and B8, but wrote that they felt better after the experience. Significantly, C25 wrote that she felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* because it transmitted a message she connected with. The road trip was her favorite part as this made Drew (her favorite character) change his life (*cf.*Ap:64). C14, who only registered a 1-point drop from SAI-before to SAI-after expanded on this point. Like C25 she wrote that although the film did not remind her of anything that happened in her life, she felt better at the end of the screening. She wrote that the film showed her that when something negative happens in our lives, we should look at it as a stepping stone to new levels. She wrote: “*Elizabethtown* does this with failure; it shows that we need to look at failure as a circumstance that can allow us to change and improve.” Her favorite sequence of the film was Drew’s return home, sprinkling his father’s ashes in different places, as this showed her that we can always look at situations from different perspectives. Her favorite character was Drew because he changed his whole life, despite the fact that his circumstances remained the same. At the end of the film he was still a failure; but by changing the way he looked at his failure, he was able to change his life (*cf.*Ap:58).

These answers seem to indicate that both female twelfth graders desire to extend the emotions felt while watching the movie beyond the experience itself. Their texts indicate that they want to hold onto the message of the film and transpose the parts they felt most positive to their own lives. On the other hand, B3 (*cf.*Ap:43) and B8’s (*cf.*Ap:45) answers do not contain any of these elements. C14 and C25’s final SAI scores were both actually higher than B3 and B8’s, but still the former felt better after watching the movie, while the latter felt the same.

Based on these results I began to think that feeling better or more hopeful at the end of the trial might have more to do with the participants’ belief that they can transfer positive ideas and principles conveyed in the film to their real lives than with percentile reductions in STAI readings. C19’s (33; 27; 24) explanations for why she felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* are relevant within this context. She wrote that it, “makes us see life differently and reflect on what is going on in our lives” (Ap:61).

C7 (47; 32; 28) and C12’s (51; 33; 31) responses add to this idea. Both 17-year old female twelfth graders wrote that they felt the same after watching *Elizabethtown*

despite registered significant overall reductions from TAI to SAI-before (15 and 18 points respectively) followed by a minor reduction in SAI-after (4 and 2 points respectively). C7 explained that she had enjoyed the film but felt the same because it changed nothing in her life (*cf.*Ap:55). C12 commented that despite transmitting “an important message”, watching the film did not change anything for her (*cf.*Ap:57). These answers indicate that these volunteers obviously enjoyed the movie and even created a certain synergy with it. Nevertheless, they do not appear to feel they can transfer the ideas they encountered in the theater into their real lives. Going to the movies is a relaxing experience for them, as reflected in their STAI readings, but that is all. C12’s explanation in particular seemed to indicate that she did a kind of “reality check” at the end of the trial and decided that the experience had been “only watching a movie”.

The above responses all arose from screenings of *Elizabethtown*. Curiously all the participants on the *Chocolate* trial wrote they felt the same after they watched this movie; even BC1 (Ap:48) and BC4 (Ap:49) who registered significant reductions from TAI to SAI-after. BC1 will be discussed in the next category, but I will look at BC4 here. BC4 (57; 45; 39) was a 38 year old female participant in the night twelfth grade equivalence *Novas Oportunidades* program. Vianne was her favorite character and her favorite scene was the one where Vianne understood that she could win people over with her sincerity. Though the film reminded her of things that had happened to her and despite the overall 18 point difference between TAI and SAI-after watching *Chocolate*, BC4 wrote that she felt the same after watching this movie. I was left to question if perhaps watching *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate* were really different experiences, or if the conditions of the screening had led to these different results.

However, this category produced a shared phenomenon that I had not expected at the outset of the project. It implied that for quite a high percentage of my sample population, simply sitting down to watch a movie had a very significant influence on state anxiety levels. I had not anticipated this result and was surprised by it and this led me to add questions to the open-answer self-reporting questionnaire to try to gain more insight into what the experience of simply sitting down to watch a movie meant to volunteers.

The overall results in this category seemed to indicate that a personal belief that the message of the film could be transported to the viewer’s real life was necessary to change the viewer’s state of mind, irrespective of anxiety levels. Relaxation may be the

reason for large decreases in anxiety levels and in one case, C23, (*cf.*Ap:63) seemed to help the volunteer to feel better and her longer answers indicated that she was aware of the change that occurred in their state of spirit.

3.2.2.2 Overview of Category 2 results

I felt the two cases not registered in the average tables because of excessively high readings, should be examined separately to see if common features could be observed in the STAI results and the long answers. Though all of nineteen year-old¹²D4's (59; 51; 45) scores are in the "medium range", there is a significant 15 point difference from TAI to SAI-after. She wrote that she felt more hopeful after watching *Elizabethtown* because the film "shows that even when we have a lot of worries, we can still be happy and make things work out because there can be a light at the end of the tunnel" (Ap:39). Significantly, she wrote that she had related personally to the film because she was going through a very difficult phase in her life at that moment. Her favorite parts of the movie were the long road trip Drew made because this allowed him to understand all the things that had happened to him, to find himself and to reencounter Claire was D4's favorite character because Claire fought to enjoy life and for the things that were really important for her. Therefore, though D4's STAI readings were still quite high, it would appear that she had a desire and the ability to carry the ideas she had learned from the movie into her real life. Thus watching *Elizabethtown* had given her tools to help her deal with the problematic situation she was experiencing at the time (*cf.* Ap:39).

On the other hand, 33 year-old male volunteer BC1 (64; 57; 46) who watched *Chocolate* wrote that he felt the same after viewing the film despite an 18-point overall reduction from TAI to SAI-after. He wrote that the film reminded him that "Maybe sometimes we are limited by our own prejudices." (Ap:48) His favorite part of the film was the beginning because "the way the story is set up makes us very curious about how it will progress." The man with the little dog (Guillaume Blerot) was his favorite character. I was sorry not to have been able to follow up on the connection to "the man

¹² I did not include her in the average tables because though her TAI only registered at 59, it was just one point off the "60 point high anxiety"; cut off point. Also all of her readings were very high and her scores affected the overall averages very significantly. Therefore, I decided to remove all her readings from the average tables, but I wanted to include D4's story in the narrative analysis because I think it is very relevant to the study.

with the little dog” but the trial did not permit this. The other answers indicate a technical, academic connection to the movie rather than a personal desire to carry a message from the film beyond the immediate experience (*cf.* Ap:48). Again it is worth noting that while D4’s numeric reduction from TAI to SAI-after is actually less than BC1’s, she feels more hopeful while he does not. Her longer answers seem to indicate that she made a personal connection with the movie and that she feels that she can take something away from it to help her deal with issues in her real life. BC1’s responses do not exhibit any of these elements.

Unlike category one where the largest reductions occurred from TAI to SAI-before, in both D4 and BC1’s cases the reduction in STAI readings is fairly evenly distributed from TAI to SAI-before and SAI-after respectively. Also, I feel the reduction in STAI scores was very significant in both cases, because of the volunteers’ high TAI readings. I was mindful of these two cases when discussing and developing work for trial five.

3.2.2.3 Overview of Category 3 results

This category is made up of volunteers who registered relatively small reductions from TAI to SAI-before, followed by a large reduction in SAI-after. 17 year-old male C22 is a good example. C22 registered an overall reduction of 25 points (46; 37; 21) from TAI to SAI-after. The greatest 16-drop is registered from SAI-before to SAI-after watching *Elizabethtown*. C22 wrote that he felt better after the experience because the film transmits this kind of feeling and the atmosphere during the trial had been good. He wrote that the film reminded him of real life events and he was particularly able to associate with the fact that the son only felt the real loss of his father some time after his death. His favorite parts were the scenes with Claire and Drew because they transmit a lot of love and happiness. Drew was his favorite character because he felt a lot like him. These answers indicate a very strong and close personal connection between the ideas transmitted in the film and the viewer’s life, as well as a feeling that these can be transferred to the volunteer’s real life (*cf.* Ap:62).

D6 (46; 37; 20) a 19 year-old male undergraduate, who registered a 17-point drop from SAI-before to SAI-after is another example. He also wrote that he felt more hopeful after watching *Elizabethtown* because the film transmits this feeling. His favorite character was Drew and his favorite part was the end since this shows that even

in the worst possible situations we should never give up on our lives because we can always find something new that can let us carry on. Though the film did not remind him of anything that happened to him personally, his answers indicate that *Elizabethtown* spoke to him in a very special way (cf. Ap:40).

D2 (50; 45; 35) also connected very personally with the film and wrote that he felt it showed how people can change. He specifically referred to the way *Elizabethtown* could help viewers understand the conflicting feelings associated with the death of loved ones and bereavement. He wrote that watching *Elizabethtown* reminded him of the recent deaths of his uncle and cousin. He felt more hopeful after watching it because the film showed ways of dealing with life and death. He connected with the scene where Drew saw his father in the coffin for the first time, and with the way Drew tried to recover the memories of the good times with his father while endeavoring to find a new direction for his life (cf. Ap:38).

The vast majority of the volunteers who fell into this category, i.e. the largest reduction in STAI readings occurred after watching *Elizabethtown* wrote that they felt better/ more hopeful after watching the movie. Their explanations revealed that they had either connected intimately to a message the movie transmitted to them, or it helped them to deal with real issues in their lives as the examples above illustrate. Again, the volunteers' answers indicated a belief that they could transmit something from this particular movie going experience to their everyday life.

There was a partial exception; 17 year-old C9 (39; 38; 27) registered an 11-point drop from SAI-before to SAI-after viewing *Elizabethtown*. However, she checked the "feel the same" box before finally ticking the "feel better" option. Her longer answers explain her hesitation; she wrote that she felt better because she had relaxed and had fun while she watched *Elizabethtown*. However, the film did not remind her of anything in her own life; but she felt that it spoke to things that could happen. Her answer seems to indicate a certain inability to think she could transmit the message of the movie into her real life; perhaps this explains her hesitance in indicating categorically that she felt better after watching the movie (Ap:56).

In this category most of the volunteers are personally aware of the large anxiety drops they have experienced through watching the movie. However, with the exception of C9, they do not only attribute this feeling to relaxation, but also to connecting with *Elizabethtown's* personal message to them. This has either helped them to deal with personal problems or given a different, more positive perspective on some aspect of

their lives. In each case volunteers had a desire to carry the message they took from the film into their real life and each seemed to take a slightly different message. This combination of circumstances seemed to produce a double positive result; reduced anxiety as well as feeling better or more hopeful.

3.2.2.4 Overview of Category 4 results

This category is made up of volunteers, whose the SAI-before was higher than the TAI, but where the SAI-after was much reduced. D7, a female 32 year old undergraduate on trial one, fell into this category. She registered (27; 31; 21) a four-point increase from TAI to SAI-before, followed by a ten-point drop during the trial. Considering that 20 is equivalent to a zero score, D7's SAI dropped to a minimal 21 point score after seeing the movie. She wrote that she felt more hopeful after the screening because it showed her that "every problem in life has a solution". She wrote that the movie transmitted the idea that the most important thing is to find solutions and have the courage to face adverse situations. After watching *Elizabethtown* she felt no sadness, but was strong, confident and happy. She wrote, "We have to be able to know and choose what is really important in life." These statements all indicate that D7 had a strong desire to transfer the ideas shown in *Elizabethtown* into her real life.

Curiously, she selected a little chosen sequence as her favorite part of the film: Claire challenging Drew about his self-absorption when he tried to break up with her. This had also been one of my favorite scenes because Drew's attitude changed from this point. Claire is not in awe of his mega-failure or suicide, but derides him for his self-absorption and challenges him to live as an artist really should. With this challenge, she wakes Drew up and makes him realize that perhaps he has been taking his friends and family too much for granted and because of this has placed exaggerated importance on his career(cf.Ap:41).

17 year-old C2 (46; 49; 35) who followed a similar STAI pattern to D7 if registered on a slightly higher scale, also wrote that she felt better, more relaxed and less inhibited after watching *Elizabethtown*. She wrote that she had a greater desire to laugh [and have fun]. She wrote the film reminded her of how she used to react when she was not able to do things properly, how disappointed this used to make her feel. Her text implied to me that seeing Drew's portrayal of his attempts at perfection showed her that this was really quite a waste of time. Her favorite part of the movie was when Drew

decides to give up his suicide attempts and to embrace life. Claire was her favorite character, not only for her joy and spontaneity, but also because of the way she was able to make Drew rethink his life. C2's long answers imply that she embraced the film's appeal to live life joyfully and spontaneously (*cf.* Ap:52).

24 year-old D1 registered a similar profile (46; 48; 35). She wrote that she felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* because she really enjoyed the film. D1 assumes the fact that she is a hopeless romantic. The romance played out between the two main characters let her wallow in a truly tender world. This mood allowed her to think about the many good things that had already happened to her and to carry these thoughts over into her expectations for her future. Her favorite part of the movie was the long journey. She believed Drew had to make this to set aside the futile things that had been at the centre of his life before. The journey allowed him to embrace something that was truly important for his life in the busy, crowded colorful farmer's market (*cf.* Ap:38).

In all these cases there was only a slight increase from TAI to SAI-before normally followed by a significant drop to SAI-after. The above volunteers' comments indicate a very personal and powerful connection to the ideas transmitted in *Elizabethtown* and the notion that these could have a positive effect on real lives and futures. However, 31-year old BC5 (35; 39; 33), who watched *Chocolate*, did not respond in the same manner. It must be noted that her decrease in SAI is smaller than in the other cases. She wrote that she felt the same after watching this movie, even though it reminded her that we should not judge people according to their outward appearance. While her remarks speak to assimilating attitudes observed in the movie, they were quite impersonal and technical. They do not indicate hope in new attitudes or approaches as the ones generated by watching *Elizabethtown* did (*cf.* Ap:50).

At this point I had not understood why there would be increases from TAI to SAI-before. Initially, I thought that this might be associated with the actual film trial and I added questions on general movie going experiences and habits to the open-answer self-reporting questionnaires to try to understand the factors that might be behind the increases in the scores from TAI to SAI-before. Later A3 on trial five proposed an alternative way of looking at this phenomenon.

3.2.2.5 Overview of Category 5 results

In this category, there was very little change throughout the trial. The answers to some of the longer questions in this group caused me a degree of perplexity initially and returned me to the question of why and how do certain types of fictional stories affect us as they do. In all there were six cases that registered a 3 point or lower alteration from TAI to SAI-after and a further 3 which registered a 5 point fluctuation. I had anticipated that volunteers in this category would write that they felt the same after the trial, however most wrote that they felt better.

An example was 38 year-old B4 (44; 43; 42) who was discussed earlier. Not only did he feel more hopeful after watching *Elizabethtown* but actually felt encouraged with a “renewed soul”. He ascribed this sensation to the film’s strong message, which spoke very personally to him, even if he wrote that the film did not remind him of anything that actually happened in his own life. The sound track and “promotional” (rural) images of the U.S. were his favorite parts of the movie. I was curious about the reference to the sound track, because this too is one of the elements of the film that conveys hope to me, but B4 was the only volunteer to refer specifically to this element of the film (*cf.* Ap:43). Also 38 year-old B6 (35; 31; 32) wrote that he felt more hopeful after watching *Elizabethtown*: “I feel more hopeful because one needs to believe that a positive outcome is possible.” The film reminded him of different failures that had occurred during his life. Claire was his favorite character because she brought meaning back to Drew’s life and the end where love and life prevail was his favorite part of the movie (*cf.* Ap:44). The longer answers in these two cases indicate that if viewers have a desire to transfer the positive message of the film beyond the viewing period they can feel more hopeful despite minimal changes in STAI readings.

One is left to ask: is this positive response due to something in the film itself; the viewer; or a unique connection between the two? There is obviously no one all-encompassing answer to this question, but I do think that it is significant that both B4 and B6 were in situations of real life crisis – adult unemployment in an economically depressed region - when they watched *Elizabethtown*, and it brought something positive into their lives.

17 year-old C28 (40; 38; 35) shows a steady decline in STAI readings. She also wrote that she felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* because it showed her different ways of dealing with issues. She gave the way Mitch’s death is dealt with as an

example. She wrote: “Normally death is seen as a tragedy; but in the movie it is looked at as a celebration” (Ap:65). Thus watching the movie appeared to expand C28’s total living experience and allowed her to look at an issue from a different perspective. A similar pattern can be seen in C10’s case. 17 year-old C10 registered no change in her SAI readings during the screening though there is a significant reduction from TAI to SAI-before (49; 39; 39). Nevertheless, she also wrote she felt better, with more enthusiasm to continue with her “fight”. She said the film reminded her of the way she had dealt with her failures and missed objectives before. Watching the movie had helped her understand that she had felt “depressed” about this kind of thing without any real reason previously. Her favorite part of the film was when Drew danced alone in the middle of the trees. She wrote, she had done this too and it felt really good (*cf.* Ap: 65) Again one sees an individual connection with the movie and the fact that ideas she saw in this might help her to see personal issues in a different light.

Despite the fact that there is no change between her SAI readings before and after watching *Elizabethtown*, and only a minimal 4-point reduction from TAI to SAI, 17-year old C16 (29; 25; 25) also wrote that she felt better after watching the movie. She ascribes this to the fact that the movie shows us Drew overcoming his problems. This was good for C16 because it transmitted a message of hope. The film reminded her both of good and bad things that had happened in her own life. Drew and Claire’s reunion at the end was her favorite part, because it was emotional and transmitted happiness (*cf.* Ap:59). Despite constant SAI readings, C16 appears to react to general feelings transmitted by the movie. Contrarily BC3 (37; 36; 31) watched *Chocolate* and like all the volunteers who participated in this screening, wrote that she felt the same after the viewing (*cf.* Ap: 49). She and the others did not add anything relevant in their long answers. This again returns us to the questions already mentioned.

The review of the long answer questionnaires in this section was very relevant. It demonstrated that while reduced SAI readings can be reflected in feeling better or more hopeful as registered in the categories viewed previously, especially in category one and three, these sensations can exist by themselves. Thus, while they may influence each other, especially in the cases where volunteers attributed feeling better to relaxation, they may also have separate causal agents. Volunteers’ answers seem to indicate that it can be proposed that feeling better after watching a movie and reductions in anxiety levels produced by watching the same movie are not different expressions of the same phenomenon, but in fact different reactions. The former seems to be related to the

viewer's belief that something positive can be transferred from the movie to real life; the latter to relaxation offered by the experience. Also, not all literary or filmic objects, even if part of the same genre, affect audiences in the same way, as implied by the different reactions to *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate*. Finally, the connection between movie and viewer is different depending on the viewer's circumstances, as illustrated by the very positive reaction by some volunteers on trial 2.

3.2.2.6 Overview of Category 6 results

The volunteers registered in this category suffered an increase in SAI-after and/or wrote that they felt worse after viewing the movie. This was another intriguing category. However, one point I believe must be stated; even when SAI-after is the highest value, there are only slight changes in readings registered if we are to compare these changes to the reductions previously discussed. There were two cases where teenage female volunteers wrote they felt worse at the end of the trial C13 and C24. However, in these cases there were reductions in STAI readings - C13 (45; 40; 38) (*cf. Ap:58*) and C24, (51; 28; 34) (*cf. Ap:63*). There were also three cases where SAI-after readings were higher than SAI-before but lower than TAI - C1's (47; 41; 42) (*cf. Ap:52*), C18 (42; 31; 37) (*cf. Ap:60*) and C26 (37; 31; 35) (*cf. Ap:65*); four cases where the SAI-after readings were the highest of all - B10 (46; 48; 49) (*cf. Ap:46*), C6 (34; 38; 40) (*cf. Ap:54*), C11 (34; 30; 35) (*cf. Ap:57*) and C21 (28; 28; 29) (*cf. Ap:62*). C11 is slightly different because SAI-before was lower than TAI and SAI-after is only slightly higher.

I shall first examine the cases where volunteers wrote they felt worse at the end of the trial, but there was a reduction from TAI to SAI-after, again reinforcing the notion that, while feeling better and state anxiety reduction effects might coincide, they do not necessarily have to, as they may have different causal agents. 17 year-old C13 registered a seven-point reduction from TAI to SAI-after, but wrote that she felt worse after watching *Elizabethtown* because, though it did not remind her of things that happened in her real life, it made her think about things that she does not usually think about (*cf. Ap:58*). C24 (51; 28; 34), also 17 years old, wrote that she felt worse after watching *Elizabethtown*, despite a massive 21-point drop from her TAI to SAI-before viewing the movie. Even considering the subsequent six-point increase in SAI at the end of the trial, her SAI-after is still 14 points below her TAI. But C24 wrote that she felt tired and unmotivated at the end of the trial, despite enjoying the parts where Claire

(her favorite character) supported Drew (*cf.Ap:63*). Unlike C13, *Elizabethtown* reminded her of things that had happened in her real life. The volunteers' long answers made me think that the film touched on sensitive issues. They both indicated that watching *Elizabethtown* made them think of things they did not want to think about and I wondered if this is what made them feel worse after watching it.

Curiously, again a genuine reaction occurs when the viewer feels the film touches on aspects of their real life; in this case it happens to be a negative connection rather than a positive one. Remembering how the free associative writing had helped me even when I followed sequences that caused me discomfort, I wondered if this would have been useful for these girls. However, the type of trial did not permit such an approach.

C6 (34; 38; 40) wrote that he felt the same after watching the movie, despite a slight increase in STAI readings during the trial. He enjoyed the film, but wrote the noise in the room distracted him. He was the only one to refer to noise in the room and though there had been a lively debate both before and after the screening, I do not have a recollection of noise during it. Samson was his favorite character and he liked the creativity behind Drew's transformation of his exercise bike into a suicide machine (*cf.Ap:54*). 17 year-old C21 (28; 28; 29) also wrote he felt the same at the end of the trial and the film did not remind him of anything that had happened in his life. He wrote that he enjoyed the film, but he was also aware that watching it did not change anything (*cf.Ap:62*). Again this reinforces a response that appeared in other categories; if the viewer decides that the film cannot contribute anything to his/her real life during or after viewing, the sentiments felt during the screening will be limited to this experience only.

The following cases all registered a slight increase in SAI readings during the course of the trial, but all the volunteers wrote that they felt better after watching *Elizabethtown*. This group again supports the notion that the viewer has to be willing to believe that he/she can transfer notions from the film to his/her real life for them to feel better after watching a movie and that this can have a separate causal path to reductions in anxiety readings. C18 is just such a case. Despite an increase from SAI-before to SAI-after, C18 (42; 31; 37) wrote that she felt better after watching the movie because it offered her a moment of total relaxation and at the same time a space to think about the things "we do and don't do" (*cf.Ap:60*). 17 year-old C1's (47; 41; 42) SAI-after is slightly higher than her SAI-before, but despite this marginally higher SAI-after score, C1 also wrote that she felt better after watching the movie. Her longer answers

demonstrate her desire to transfer new ideas that are relevant to her age and social condition from the film. She wrote that watching the movie reminded her of things that had happened in her own life and it allowed her to see “that what we may think of [at a particular moment in time] as the worst moments of our lives need not be so. Life changes and this can happen at any moment” (The road trip was her favorite part because it represents the journey of discovery that we all have to make and she wrote Drew’s discovery [of himself] happened during the trip, ours happens during our lives, or at least we hope so (*cf.* Ap:52).

These answers point to a strong personal connection between the viewer as a teenage high-school student and the movie. They demonstrate how watching it eased some of the angst associated with this phase. B10 (46; 48; 49) registered a small but steady increase from TAI to SAI-after, but also wrote that he felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* simply because he liked the story. There appears to be no special connection to the movie as he wrote that it did not remind him of anything that had happened in his own life and his favorite part was simple comedy – Drew’s unfruitful search for the 60B highway (Ap:46). B10’s comments reinforce the notion that simply embracing the emotions derived from a constructive interlude, such as watching a movie can improve one’s state of mind.

17-year old C26 (37; 31; 35) wrote that the movie did not remind him about anything in his own life, but he seemed to make a strong and quite personal connection with the film. He wrote that he felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* because it showed that we should not worry too much about success and failure as such. Rather we should concentrate on living our lives day-by-day. The road trip was his favorite part of the movie, because it showed another side of life. It makes viewers think about and appreciate the concept of the “journey of life” and takes them away from banality of daily routines (*cf.* Ap:64). 17-year old C27 (44; 24; 31) also wrote that he felt better after watching *Elizabethtown*, despite the 7-point increase from SAI-before to SAI-after. However, yet one must recall that there is still a 13-point reduction from TAI to SAI-after. C27 wrote that he felt better after watching the movie because he liked and found its message – how to deal with problems – interesting. His favorite part was Holly’s “breakdown” because this reveals the nature of her relationship with her husband (*cf.* Ap:65).

3.2.2.7 Conclusions from these results

The statistical analysis and review of longer answers indicated clear and dominant tendencies. The first was unexpected, but very definite. In the vast majority of cases, sitting down to watch a movie permits significant reductions in state anxiety levels. The second was more anticipated; watching a movie with humor and a positive, uplifting message like *Elizabethtown* or *Chocolate* produces reductions in anxiety levels. It had surprised me to see that the order of the second reduction is often inferior to the first, but then on reflection this also made sense as sometimes the first reduction was so large it would have been difficult to sustain this order of reduction. I was pleased that I had figures for trait anxiety levels and state anxiety values both before and after watching the movie, as this permitted insight into how anticipation of the movie influenced state anxiety levels as well as the act of watching the movie itself. The STAI results indicate that watching movies reduces anxiety levels as only four cases of slight increase in STAI readings were observed during all the single trials.

An unexpected result has been that reductions in SAI readings were not always reflected in viewer's perceptions of feeling better or more hopeful. While these outcomes normally coincide, this did not always happen and, in fact, some volunteers with large reductions in STAI felt the same or, in two cases even worse after watching the movie. Conversely some volunteers with minor reductions in STAI felt renewed after watching *Elizabethtown*. This outcome led to me to review of volunteers' longer answers to gain insight into causal factors. This led me to conclude that reductions in STAI readings appear to be associated with relaxation offered by the movie going experience. I noticed that a few volunteers reported a more generalized better state of mind because of this relaxation. However, the longer answers of most volunteers who wrote that they felt better or more hopeful after watching the movie indicated that they thought that they could transfer elements from the movie that spoke to them into their daily lives. Conversely, the longer answers of volunteers who experienced reduction in anxiety but write they feel the same, showed that they do not think that elements from the movie can be transmitted to their own lives. Two volunteers experienced reductions in SAI readings, but wrote they felt worse after watching the movie because it made them think about things they do not want to contemplate. These answers imply that for a film to provoke emotional change (even a negative one), viewers must see the film or ideas it transmits as relevant and applicable in their own lives.

Volunteers who did not experience significant reductions in anxiety wrote that they felt better or more hopeful after watching the movie. In general, volunteers' long answers indicated that this happened when they made a personal and positive connection with ideas transmitted in the movie, and viewers believed that notions learned in the movie can be transferred to their real lives. Thus, one is left to conclude that while the phenomena of relaxation and feeling better after watching a movie can coincide, they can also exist autonomously and thus are probably produced by different causal agents. Reduction in SAI readings appear to be associated with physical relaxation. Feeling better after watching a movie is linked to this phenomenon in some cases, such as C18 and C2; however, in these single screening trials at least, volunteers could feel better after the screening, without significant reductions in anxiety levels, if they connected with ideas transmitted in the movie and felt that these can be transferred into real life conditions.

Both movies exhibited during the trials told simple stories with positive if alternative outcomes. However, the films appeared to affect anxiety levels similarly; but viewers' sentiments differently. At the end of trial three, participants told me they had enjoyed watching *Chocolate*. However, even when significant reductions were registered in anxiety readings, all the volunteers on the *Chocolate* trial wrote that they felt the same after the session finished. Conversely, many volunteers wrote that they felt better after watching *Elizabethtown*, independently of reduction in STAI readings. I wondered initially if the fact that only eight volunteers watched *Chocolate*, while many more watched *Elizabethtown* had significant bearing on this outcome. Even so, there were only seven volunteers in the first trial with *Elizabethtown* and the majority wrote that they felt more hopeful after watching this movie, so this implied that the reaction to the two films was not related to the number of volunteers on each trial. If anything, the volunteers on trial three should have reacted very positively to this movie. The group had selected *Chocolate* themselves because they felt they could relate more readily to a story that takes place in Lansquenet-sous-Tannes than one revolving around corporate/rural America as they had all lived most of their lives in rural communities. However, though they enjoyed it, it did not change how they felt.

I wondered why *Chocolate* and *Elizabethtown* produced such different reactions. Was *Chocolate* too realistic for them? True, it is a fictional story, it never happened in the historic, but it speaks directly to a reality that can be easily identified by any person brought up in a rural environment in southern Europe in the 1930s, 40s, 50s or even 60s.

On the other hand, though *Elizabethtown* contains elements very relevant for today's world, the viewer realizes while watching it that the story never occurred nor was likely to occur. Crowe's Drew and Claire could not exist in the real world exactly as he presents them just like Huck and Jim could only have floated along the Mississippi in Mark Twain's imagination. In both cases the pictures are colorfully and authentically drawn, but audiences know instinctively that these characters are cleverly crafted montages and so can choose to engage with them or not without compromise. Is there something in their obviously fictional nature that allows our logical processes to turn off our reality checking process and thus assimilate their potential messages more easily?

Or was the solution to this question a much simpler idea? I wondered if volunteers on the *Chocolate* trial were affected by its timing, the screening occurring late after a day's work? Therefore I decided to continue the work by investigating how the same group would react to different movies and I began to plan the double trials. The first double trial was to involve an 11th grade class of teenagers who would watch Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown* and *Say Anything*. The second was carried out by an adult education group who would watch *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate*. I also wanted to see how viewers would react to a different type of movie. Therefore I planned a third trial where volunteers would watch different types of movies. High school students watched *Elizabethtown* and *Good* on trial three.

3.3 Double screening group trials

The procedures used while conducting the double trials followed very similar lines to the original trials. However, because each group did two screenings the planning and preparation with local coordinators was more extended. I worked with three separate groups for approximately three months each. In all, the trials lasted from 23rd December 2009 to 19th October 2010. As indicated in the introduction, I added new questions to the long answer questionnaire because of the feedback from the previous trials. The questionnaires for the first screening in trials five, six and seven retained the earlier questions, but began with “What thoughts occurred to you during and after watching the movie?” to gain more insight into what watching that particular movie meant to volunteers. Because of results obtained in the first screenings of double trials, I added two new questions to the questionnaire for the second screenings in trials five and six and the first of trial seven to learn more about volunteers’ habits and what the movie going experience meant to them. The questions were, “What does watching a movie mean to you?” and “How many films do you watch a month?”

As with the single trials, I presented and discussed possible application strategies with local coordinators. From my experience with the simpler single screening trials, I knew that the success of the longer trials would depend heavily on the participation and enthusiasm of local coordinators. Their intervention was vital because they introduced the trials to school governing bodies appropriately as they know what is possible from an administrative perspective. Also, their knowledge of students and awareness of their needs meant that they were able to anticipate the kind of scenarios volunteers would react to. Therefore, I considered their suggestions for application strategies and individual methods were developed for each group conciliating the technical parameters and local coordinators desires.

Trial five began as a volunteer activity associated with a core element of a regular 11th grade course program. As a result of the success of the first screening, the work continued as a mandatory class element but the final screening was done again on a volunteer basis. The work carried out during this trial was very significant as it permitted me to fine-tune techniques and work closely with a relatively large group of students in a high school environment for an extended period.

Trial six was carried out with adult education students. The local coordinators decided to present it as a mandatory cultural awareness activity. The films and concepts discussed during the trials were used by teachers for additional course work. Not all students participated in both trials, as specific adult education programs have different requirements depending on participants' educational and employment backgrounds, but the profile of each group was similar.

Trial seven was performed by secondary school students. The films viewed were also used as the basis for further work in both disciplines applied. Unfortunately, due to scheduling difficulties the trials were actually carried out during different academic years. Thus there was a slight variation in class composition, but the groups shared a common profile.

As in single trials, the local coordinator presented me to the group. General discussion on movies was followed by definitions of anxiety and fear and the distinction between state and trait anxiety. As the trials progressed this discussion was elaborated as demonstrated earlier. Then SAI questionnaires were distributed, discussed and filled in by participants. When all participants had completed these, the TAI questionnaires were distributed, discussed and completed. Then participants watched the movie and repeated the SAI afterwards and the long answer questionnaire. All the trials were carried out in urban centers of rural areas.

3.3.1 Trial Five

16 year-old 11th grade students of both sexes participated in the group screenings associated with trial five took place between 23rd December 2009 and 31st March 2010. The results will be reported in this chapter. However, individual work with single volunteers that took place at this time and later (June 2010 and October 2011) will be reported in Chapter Four. The trial began as an optional extra-curricular activity associated with "the Reading Contract" in the Portuguese language program. Participants watched Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown* and *Say Anything* in volunteer groups and the results of these two screenings are registered in this section. All the screenings took place in the school library which is prepared for this purpose. Feedback sessions and more general discussions occurred in regular classrooms.

Chronologically trial five was the first double trial. My original aim on this trial was to see if volunteers' anxiety levels reacted in a similar fashion when they watched

two similar movies. The local coordinator was interested in showing students films that could help reduce their anxiety levels as this was a priority for the group. These students were highly motivated and ambitious, but had also drawn teachers' attention because they exhibited a high degree of "natural" anxiety. Students worked hard but did not reap the benefits of this because of their anxiety and nervousness. Tests were prepared for but dreaded, and a lower-than-expected mark led to tears and deep disappointment. The school psychologist had recommended that teachers try to incorporate stress release exercises in class and the class teacher, who was my local coordinator, hoped the group film screenings might give the students proof of the benefits of relaxing with a film.

Within this context, I suggested *Elizabethtown* because of the results it had produced in the single trials, and we chose Crowe's first commercial success *Say Anything* as the second movie for the trial because it is similar to *Elizabethtown* and could be seen as having influenced it. The *Elizabethtown* screening took place at the beginning of the Christmas holidays on 22nd December 2009 from 10.00 to 13.00 a.m. The screening occurred in the school before students collected their term grades. Fifteen (eight girls, seven boys) 16 year-olds participated in the screening. The group participated actively in the introductory discussion and we followed the procedures laid out at the beginning of the section. I was encouraged to see so many participants because they were all volunteers. They appeared to enjoy the movie and even though their grades were posted during the screening and they were anxious to know their results, they still spend a lot of time filling out their longer questionnaires and discussed the film. In general, they appeared to have really enjoyed the experience.

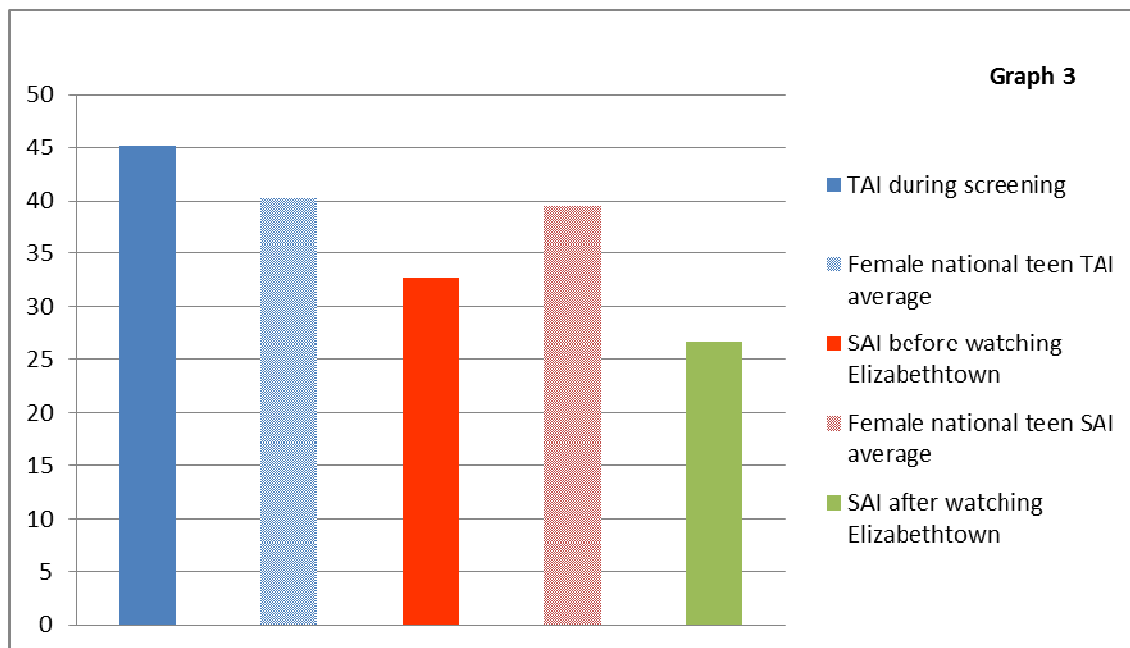
They were a bright lively group and seemed confident and relaxed during the screening. However, the results of the STAI questionnaires revealed a different reality. The table analyzing the female results demonstrates that this group reacts very well to the whole movie-going experience. While the volunteers' average TAI score is over 5 points higher than Silva's standardized value for this age group in Portugal, the SAI-before was 6.8 points below Silva's average SAI score and SAI-after was 12.7 points below standard levels.

Table 6 Trial Five: Average female STAI reactions during *Elizabethtown* screening

SAI before viewing <i>Elizabethtown</i>	Average female high school SAI	TAI	Average female high school TAI	SAI after viewing <i>Elizabethtown</i>
32,7	39,5	45,3	40,2	26,8

The TAI scores are in keeping with teachers' observations that this group had a high level of inherent anxiety. However, the SAI readings indicate that this group reacts very positively to the movie-going experience in general, and to *Elizabethtown* in particular. This group demonstrates the greatest overall reduction from TAI to SAI-after, 18.5 points; 12.6 occurring from TAI to SAI-before followed by a further 5.9 drop from SAI-before to SAI-after.

Graph 3 Trial Five: Average female STAI reactions during *Elizabethtown* screening



The results indicate clearly that watching *Elizabethtown* had a very positive impact on these young people. Again general trends were produced from very distinct individual results as demonstrated in the table below. There are many notable cases, but the most remarkable was A3 (52, 70, 32),¹³ whose results had to be excluded from the average calculation. Her progression during the course of the screening was noteworthy registering a 38-point reduction in SAI in less than three hours and not surprisingly she commented that she felt better in her longer questionnaire (*cf.* Ap:180).

¹³ After I had extracted the data from the initial *Elizabethtown* screening, I contacted the local coordinator in early January because of volunteers' average high TAI scores, and in particular because of A3's very high SAI score. We discussed the general results and I pointed out that the high TAI scores supported teachers' opinions and called attention to A3's case. Though teachers knew that all was not well with A3, they were surprised at her very high SAI score. They transmitted the STAI results to the school psychologist.

Table 7 Trial Five: Individual female STAI reactions during *Elizabethtown* screening

No	Sex	Age	SAI before	TAI	SAI after	Reference
A 1	F	16	32	47	22	(Ap:193)
A3	F	16	70	52	32	(Ap:180)
A 4	F	16	23	54	26	(Ap:183)
A 7	F	16	51	57	31	(Ap:189)
A 8	F	16	51	54	33	(Ap:196)
A 10	F	16	21	45	21	(Ap:197)
A 13	F	16	30	35	33	(Ap:200)
A 15	F	16	21	25	20	(Ap:202)
Average			37.4	46,13	26,88	
Average excluding A3			32.7	45.3	26.1	

This individual table demonstrates that although A3's reduction from SAI-before to SAI-after is impressive, A8 (54; 51; 33) A4 (54; 23; 22) and A7 (57; 51; 31) cannot be ignored either, as they register a 21, a 22 and a 26 point decrease from TAI to SAI-after respectively. A4's anxiety reading undergoes a massive reduction at the notion of simply watching a movie; but A7 reacts to watching *Elizabethtown* as had been the case with A3. A3, A4 and A7 did other work, therefore their longer answer questionnaires will be reviewed in Chapter Four. At this point I will only present an overview of the opinions expressed by volunteers who did not do other activities. The individual reductions in STAI readings are quite remarkable in this trial, so volunteers' comments are relevant.

In the girls' longer answer questionnaires, they wrote that they felt better after watching *Elizabethtown*. All except A13 wrote that the movie reminded them of things that had happened in their lives. The road trip and the ending were generally the favorite parts, with the exception of A1, who preferred Claire and Drew's first meeting. Claire or Drew were selected as favorite characters. A1 (47; 32; 22) scored a considerable 25 point reduction from TAI to SAI-after and her final score is just 2 points above the possible minimum. She wrote that she felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* because it showed her that even if we have an objective in life, we can often encounter unexpected surprises. After watching *Elizabethtown* she concluded that what we see,

hear and learn along the way is more important than attaining an objective, though we should fight for this (*cf.* Ap:193).

A8 (54; 51; 33) registered a minor decrease from TAI to SAI-before, but then an 18 point drop during the course of the screening. Understandably, she wrote that she felt better after watching the movie. She wrote it showed her that we should not be tied to the past or obsessed with the future; rather we must live the present. The film showed her that we are able to overcome anything, if we want to and fight for this. When she was watching the movie, it made her think that life is to be lived and we are the principal actors in “this film” (*cf.* Ap:196). While A8 reacted specifically to watching *Elizabethtown*, A10 seemed to respond well to the whole movie going experience. She registered (45; 21; 21) demonstrating a very steep decrease from TAI, with SAI-before reaching minimal levels. She then retained this value throughout the screening. Thus, it can be proposed that she reacts very well to the idea of watching movies. She wrote that she felt better after seeing *Elizabethtown* because it shows many ways of dealing with personal problems and this was helpful for her (*cf.* Ap:197).

A15 (25; 21; 21) wrote that she felt better, calmer and happier after watching the movie because it made her think that no matter how hard or difficult life may be, we can always overcome our difficulties (*cf.* Ap:202). Not surprisingly A3 (52; 70; 32) also wrote that she felt better after watching *Elizabethtown*. Her long answers show that her high SAI-before readings were due to circumstances outside the domain of the screening and indicated that her STAI readings probably decreased so dramatically because she connected directly and personally with ideas transmitted in *Elizabethtown*. These allowed her to gain a different perspective on her living situation and helped her to develop new coping skills (*cf.* Ap:180). Her results will be discussed in more detail later since A3 did a lot of other exercises.

A13 (35; 30; 33) actually registered a slight increase in SAI reading during the screening, though her final value was still slightly below her TAI reading. I consider her longer answers explain this response. A13 wrote that initially she had not really enjoyed the film or its comedy. However, her opinion started to change at the memorial scene when the film became more interesting for her. After watching *Elizabethtown* she wrote that it “shows that life deserves to be lived and we should not give up even if a lot of bad things happen”. She also wrote that she felt better after watching the movie because it “wakes us up to understand the best and most important things in life” (Ap:200).

Thus, volunteers' self-reporting open-answer questionnaires demonstrate that the majority of the female volunteers who attended the *Elizabethtown* screening of trial five wrote extensively about what watching the film meant to them personally. I considered that answering the longer questionnaire had been particularly beneficial in this case because volunteers seemed to think deeply about how the film connected with them and the questionnaires permitted them to transmit their experience of watching the movie into a coherent written narrative. In all these cases, independent of the actual STAI value changes, volunteers' long answers indicate that even this short exposure to a film could be significant.

I was reminded of Holland's proposal that while viewing a film may activate defense mechanism, reflection was necessary for viewers to become aware at a conscious level of how this activation. I wondered if this single viewing, a screening followed by a period of reflection and this reflection transmitted into formal language, could present an example of how a fictional narrative may offer alternative perspectives on issues central to viewers' lives. Did watching *Elizabethtown* offer volunteers an alternative paradigm? Whatever the case, volunteers' longer answers all seem to indicate that they believed that the ideas transmitted in the film could be transported into their real lives and they all felt better after watching the movie.

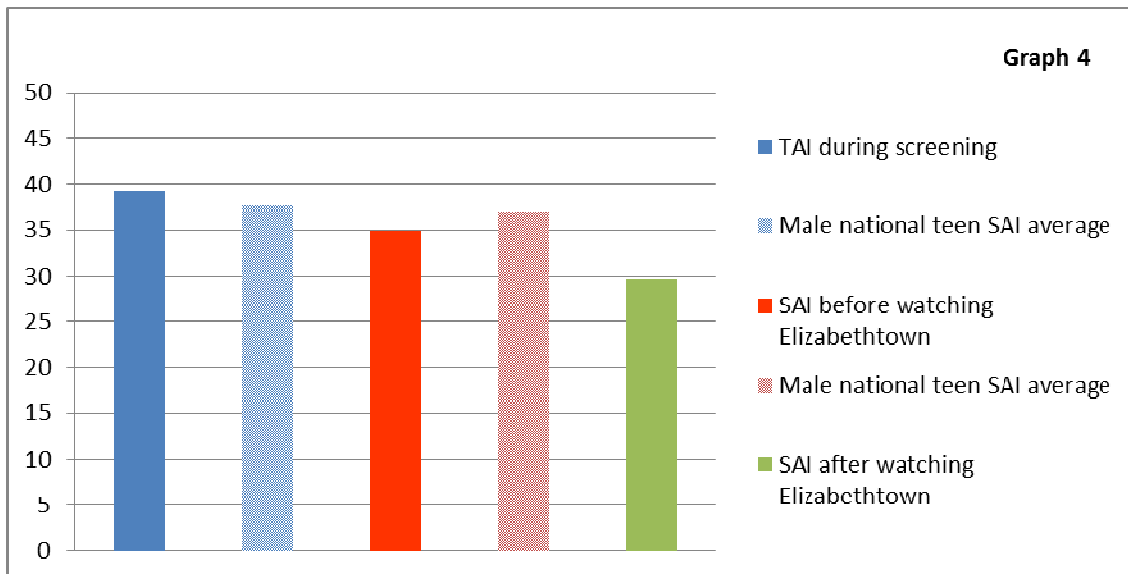
After analyzing the girls' results, I then went on to review the boys' outcomes. As the table below indicates, the boys' average TAI and SAI-before results are closer to national figures than the girls' values, with the trial TAI average score just a 1.5 above the national average and the SAI-before 2.1 below the SAI national average. In terms of the trial, there is a significant average 5.3 point reduction from SAI-before to SAI-after, and an overall 9.7 drop from TAI to SAI-after.

Table 8 Average male STAI reactions during *Elizabethtown* screening in trial five

TAI during screening	Male teen TAI average	SAI before watching Elizabethtown	Male teen SAI average	SAI after watching Elizabethtown
39,3	37,8	34,9	37	29,6

However, though the reduction is less than in the girls' table, the overall pattern of anxiety reduction is maintained.

Graph 4 Trial Five: Average male STAI reactions during *Elizabethtown* screening



The STAI average gives a notion of a general trend. However, as in all the other groups observed, a review of individual outcomes as exhibited in Table 9 below shows again that, final averages are produced from very different individual cases. All the boys, with the exception of A2 (*cf.* Ap:194) and A9 (*cf.* Ap:191), indicated that they felt better after watching *Elizabethtown*. However, A2 (35; 32; 29) wrote he felt the same because it did not change any of his ideas, even if it was a fun film. The road trip was his favorite part of the movie because that was when Drew changed the most (*cf.* Ap:194). A9 (48, 47, 41) experienced a larger drop in STAI readings during the course of the screening than A14, who had written he felt better. A9 wrote that he felt the same after watching the movie because he does not believe experiences felt while a film can be transferred to his real life (*cf.* Ap:191). Again we see, when viewers cannot or do not see a possible transference from screen to real life conditions, they do not feel different after watching the films.

All volunteers with the exception of A14 wrote that the film reminded them of incidents that occurred in their own lives. However, the boys did not write as extensively as the girls about watching *Elizabethtown* influenced them. A5 attributed feeling better to relaxation (*cf.* Ap:187), while A11 attributed this to discovering how to deal with difficult situations in life (*cf.* Ap:189). A14 wrote he felt better because it was interesting to see how the story unfolded and to watch the adventures that befell Drew

and he was able to take positive ideas from these (cf. Ap:201). The individual STAI results are presented below.

Table 9 Trial Five: Individual male STAI reactions during *Elizabethtown* screening

No	Sex	Age	SAI before	TAI	SAI after	Reference
A 2	M	16	32	35	29	(Ap:194)
A 5	M	16	24	39	21	(Ap:187)
A 6	M	16	30	37	26	(Ap:195)
A 9	M	16	47	48	41	(Ap:191)
A 11	M	16	35	38	28	(Ap:198)
A 12	M	16	41	39	27	(Ap:199)
A 14	M	16	35	39	35	(Ap:201)
Average			34,86	39.29	29,57	

Some cases like A5, A6, A11 and A12 register strong reductions from TAI to SAI-after (39; 24; 21), (37; 30; 26), (38; 35; 28) and (39; 41; 27); others like A9 and A14 while registering a certain reduction still remained relatively high (48; 47; 41) and (39; 35; 35); but while A9 wrote that he felt the same after watching *Elizabethtown*, A14 wrote that he felt better because he found the development of the story very interesting. He observed: “despite all the problems that Drew encounters there is always a positive side and life goes on”. (Ap:201) Perhaps A14 steady STAI scores can be explained by the fact that he wrote that he felt unsatisfied, sad and alone as he watched the movie, but afterwards the film brought him clarity, joy and conviction. This change of heart might explain his feeling better after watching the movie, despite only experiencing a mild reduction in STAI reading. A5 and A9 did the repeat STAI trial, therefore their answers will be considered in the section dedicated to individual cases.

Because of the general reductions in SAI results, on the local coordinators request, the school board permitted me to do individual feedback sessions with students and make a general presentation on the advantages of contact with literature and film. In light of the reductions in anxiety levels achieved during the viewing of *Elizabethtown*, the local coordinator asked if I would also give a general presentation on anxiety, explaining it and referring to the advantages of constructive relaxation exercises like watching a good movie or reading a relevant book. She wished me to discuss these topics as these students were so focused on achieving goals that they tended to feel time spent on leisure activity was simply wasted. However, the more they

concentrated solely on work, the less they were actually achieving. Feedback session and this presentation were scheduled for 18th February 2010. However, the feedback sessions and other class activities occupied the full time allotted, so the general class session was rescheduled for two weeks later. The significant reductions in SAI readings meant I was invited to discuss the results of the trial in private sessions with individual volunteers. This was followed by a 90-minute class session, where we discussed anxiety and how contact with films and books can reduce anxiety levels. I also presented free associative film criticism as an analysis technique. Four students asked to learn more about free associative analysis and selected a film to review.

The collective work ended three months after it started with the screening of *Say Anything* on 31st March from 10.00 – 13.00 a.m.. Both collective screenings took place during school holidays, on the day term marks were released. Unfortunately, only five volunteers participated in the *Say Anything* screening, three girls and two boys. I did not do average tables for these but I compiled a table where the five volunteers' individual results on the two screening could be observed. Also, the individual work with each student is discussed at end of this chapter because as such they will be examined together in a specific section.

Alas, I did not repeat the TAI questionnaire in this case because, according to procedures laid out in the application manual, TAI readings would not change over such a short period of time. As I have mentioned before later trials showed that real life events can indeed alter trait anxiety status in the short term. However, I was not aware of this fact at the time of the *Say Anything* screening.

Table 10 Trial Five: Comparison of results during *Elizabethtown* and *Say Anything* screenings

No	Sex	Age	S-A before	TAI	S-A after	How felt after watching the movie	Reference
A3/ <i>Elizabethtown</i>	F	16	70	52	32	Better	(Ap:180)
A3/ <i>Say Anything</i>			36		28	Better	(Ap:181)
A4/ <i>Elizabethtown</i>	F	16	23	54	22	Better	(Ap:183)
A 4/ <i>Say Anything</i>			29		23	Better	(Ap:184)
A7/ <i>Elizabethtown</i>	F	16	51	57	31	Better	(Ap:189)
A 7/ <i>Say Anything</i>			34		28	The Same	(Ap:190)
A5/ <i>Elizabethtown</i>	M	16	24	39	22	Better	(Ap:187)
A 5/ <i>Say Anything</i>			37		28	Better	(Ap:188)
A9/ <i>Elizabethtown</i>	M	16	47	48	41	The Same	(Ap:191)
A 9/ <i>Say Anything</i>			39		39	The Same	(Ap:192)

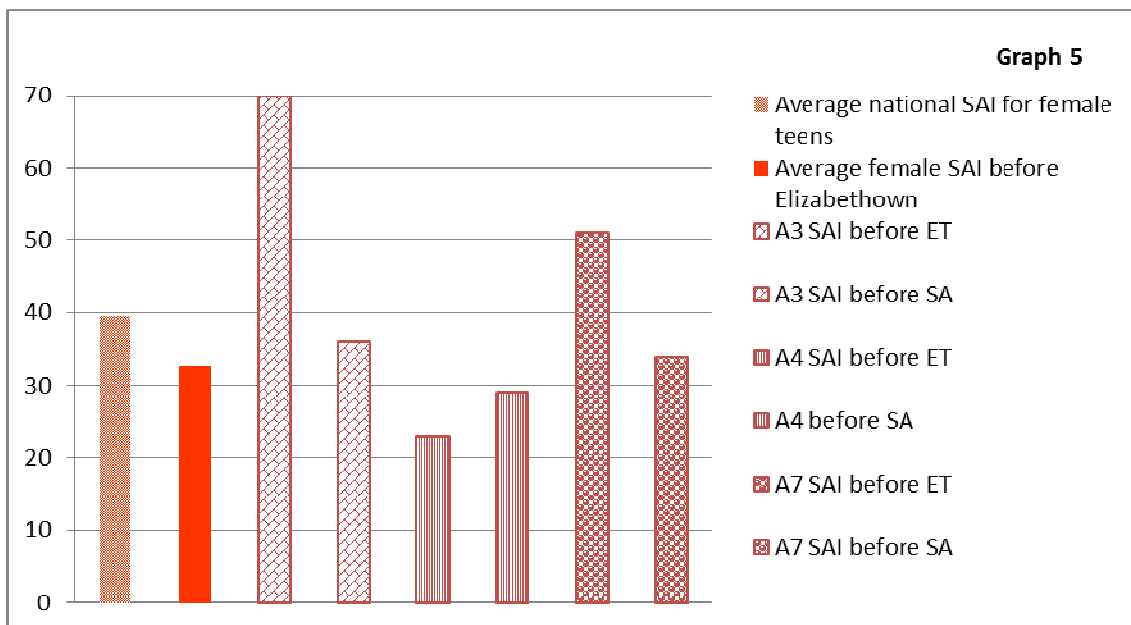
As the table shows, SAI-before readings on the *Say Anything* screening for A3, A7, and A9 were much lower than the corresponding values at the beginning of the second screening. They were in fact very near the SAI-after score of the *Elizabethtown* screening. This is very positive as it implies that the volunteers were relaxed at the outset of this second screening and I was encouraged to think that the screenings and the other activities associated with the Reading Contract project has helped them. Also encouragingly, A3 and A7's SAI readings continued to decrease during the screening. A4's SAI-before results on the *Say Anything* screening were slightly higher than on the first screening, but they remain low and relatively stable, and decrease during the second screening. A5's SAI-before is also higher on the *Say Anything* screening, though SAI decreases during it. As the largest reductions in SAI-before were registered by two girls, I felt that it would be interesting to present these against average SAI before readings on the *Elizabethtown* trial and the standard average figures presented in *Manual do Inventário de Estado-Traço de Ansiedade (STAI)* for female secondary school students (Silva 2007: 16).

Table 11 Trial Five: Comparison of individual female SAI-before watching *Elizabethtown* and *Say Anything* compared to Portuguese average and female SAI-before average on *Elizabethtown* screening

Port Av. SAI for female students	Av. female SAI-before on ET screening	A3 SAI-before ET	A3 SAI-before SA	A4 SAI-before ET	A4-before SA	A7 SAI-before ET	A7 SAI-before SA
39,5	32,7	70	36	23	29	51	34

This demonstrates that by the time the second trial was run even A3 and A7s SAI-before scores were below the Portuguese national average for category and sex. They were also close to the average SAI-before reading on the *Elizabethtown* screening. This is a marked improvement on the previous screening where only A4's reading was below the national average. When the SAI-after values are compared to the national reference values, all volunteers' scores are much lower than the national average and very close to the average SAI-after score on the *Elizabethtown* screening.

Graph 5 Trial Five: Comparison of female SAI-before watching *Elizabethtown* and *Say Anything* compared to Portuguese average and female SAI-before average on *Elizabethtown* screening



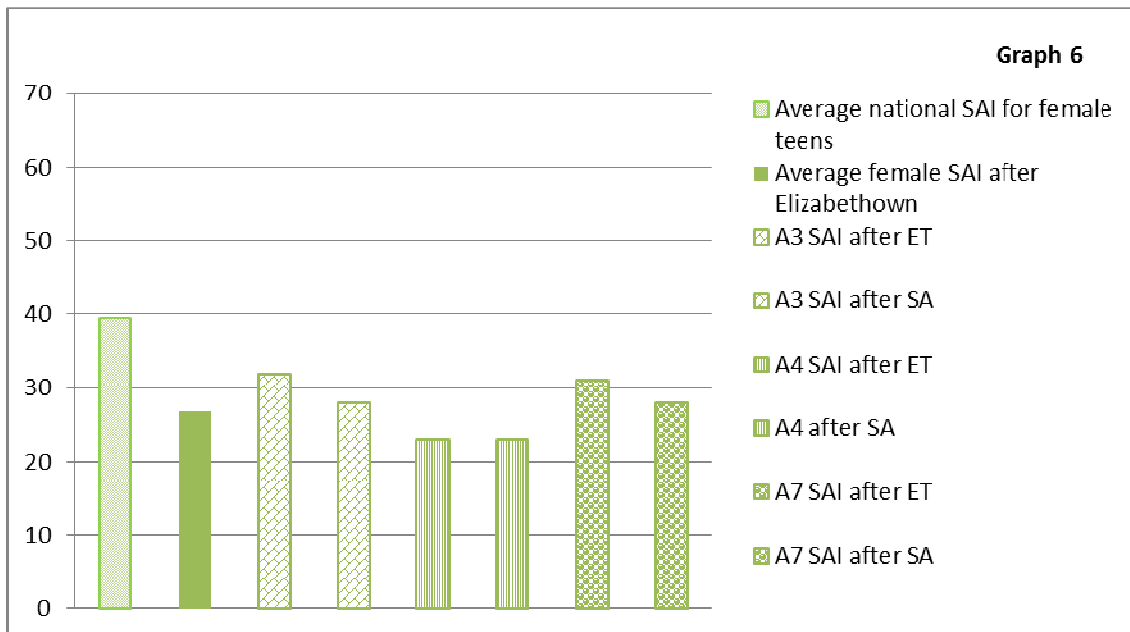
After comparing the SAI-before results, I then contrasted the SAI-after results and compared individual outcomes both to national averages and the overall average of the screening.

Table 12 Trial Five: Comparison of female SAI-after watching *Elizabethtown* and *Say Anything* compared to Portuguese average and female SAI-after average on *Elizabethtown* screening

Port Av. SAI for female students	Av. female SAI-after on ET trial	A3 SAI-after ET	A3 SAI-after SA	A4 SAI-after ET	A4 SAI-after SA	A7 SAI-after ET	A7 SAI-after SA
39,5	26,8	32	28	23	23	31	28

The table and graph clearly show that reductions in anxiety levels are maintained across both screenings. In this trial, as in the initial single trials more consistency is seen in the SAI-after readings than in any other category. Therefore, in this case at least the final STAI results are similar for both *Elizabethtown* and *Say Anything*. However, it cannot be ignored that the SAI-before readings were much lower in the second screening.

Graph 6 Trial Five: Comparison of female SAI-after watching *Say Anything* compared to Portuguese average and female SAI-after average on *Elizabethtown* screening



Because of the reduced volunteer group on the *Say Anything* screening, it is difficult to arrive at definite conclusions about how the group as a whole reacted to watching the same type of movie. However, reductions in state anxiety levels were maintained and in fact increased during the second screening. Problematic situations like A3’s initial high state anxiety level appeared to have improved solidly. Volunteers’ longer answer questionnaire seemed to indicate a certain positive feed-forward anticipation for the *Say Anything* screening and those who participated in it appeared to anticipate a good outcome.

Volunteers wrote extensively about their interaction with *Say Anything* too, but analyzing responses the reaction seemed to more due to relaxation, enjoyment and having fun than new ideas or coping skills and only 3 of the 5 wrote they felt better after watching the movie (*cf.* Ap: 181, 184, 188, 190, 192). Therefore, while anxiety reduction is maintained, the conscious reaction to each film is different. Therefore, it

seems that in this trial, at least, primary reaction due to relaxation is retained; but secondary reflective interaction is different.

3.3.2 Trial six – larger group trial where similar films were screened

Trial six was carried out on 20th January and 21st April 2010. These volunteer groups were composed of night students on different adult education evening programs and teachers and over thirty adults participated in each screening. Generally they were working adults of both sexes aged between 18 and 55, with slightly more males than females. They had returned to formal education to obtain a high school diploma. As the timetabling requirements for these groups are not always the same, some participants only did one screening, while others did both. However, approximately half of the volunteers participated in both screenings and though the individual groups may have varied, the profile of the two groups who watched the movies on trial six was very similar. Also, this profile was comparable to volunteers on trial 3. Therefore, it appeared to be an ideal group to verify if the reactions observed during the *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate* screenings on the single trials would be maintained when a similar group watched both movies.

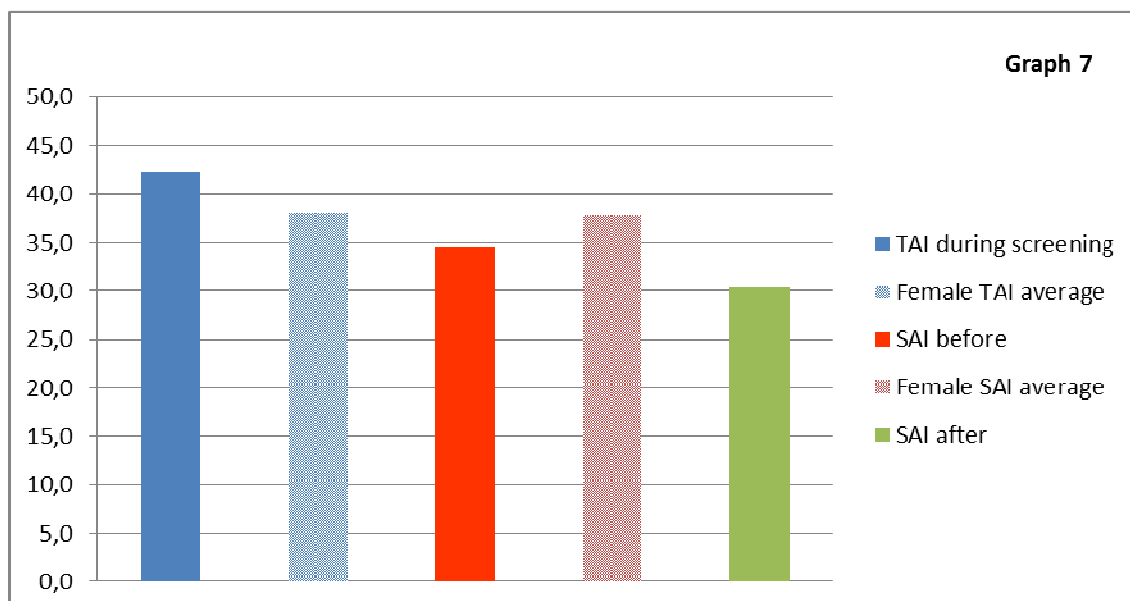
Following local coordinators suggestions, volunteers watched *Elizabethtown* first on 20th January 2010 and *Chocolate* on 21st April 2010. The trials took place during the normal class schedule from 7.00 – 10.15 p.m. The films were screened in the cinema theatre of the local cultural centre as the school has a protocol with this organization. I presented the project in the same way that I had done in the other trials, but there were a few slight differences. First, the group was much larger and because the students were not all on the same program, they did not know each other so well. There was a certain amount of hesitation at the beginning of the trial, perhaps because the atmosphere – going to the cinema was a new experience for some participants. Also, others seemed to want to prove that they were doing “serious” things in their study program and appeared a little skeptical that watching a movie could be an important thing. However, their teachers introduced the project appropriately and this gave me the opportunity to discuss the advantages of watching movies and explain fear and anxiety as concepts. I then explained the differences between trait and state anxiety and participants filled out the SAI Y1 and TAI Y2 forms before watching the movie and, though I stressed that they could use nicknames, most chose to use their real names.

The total results are presented in Table 13 because as in all the other cases individual results are significant. However, as in the case of the single trials I will present a table and a graph with the average outcomes to give an overview of the results. Excessively high scores were again removed to prevent producing misleading averages. As there were quite a few eighteen-year olds and volunteers over 40 in the adult education group, I decided not to divide samples into splintered age groups (20-40); but to compare them to Silva’s larger adult category (18-59), to be able to work with the largest sample size possible for this single group (*cf.* Silva & Spielberger 2007: 16). Following standard procedures tables and graphs were always prepared for both sexes. Eighteen women participated in the *Elizabethtown* trial. Following good procedural practice, three sets of questionnaires were removed because volunteers in these cases registered at least one score in the high anxiety category. Therefore a sample size of 15 was used to produce the *Elizabethtown* average tables.

Table 13 Trial Six: Average female STAI results related to *Elizabethtown* screening and compared to national averages

Film Trial 6 - 20th January 2010 - Film <i>Elizabethtown</i>				
Female averages high values removed n=15				
TAI during screening	Female TAI average	SAI before	Female SAI average	SAI after
42,3	38,0	34,5	37,8	30,5

Graph 7 Trial Six: Average Female STAI results related to *Elizabethtown* trial and compared to national averages



I included Silva’s adult averages in the table as bench reference points only and to demonstrate that despite the conditioning factors associated with the trials (small sample size and a tendency for some high individual values), the averages obtained from the screenings were not completely out of keeping with standard TAI figures. The average TAI value is a few points above Silva’s figure, but within the general scale and coherent with standard deviation values.

The graph and table show that there was an overall average 11.8 drop among female adult viewers from TAI to SAI after (42.3; 34.5; 30.5) during the *Elizabethtown* screening. This was almost double that recorded for adult females in the original single film trials (38.4; 36.7; 31.4) where volunteers watched either *Elizabethtown* or *Chocolate*. The pattern of reduction is also different. In the single screening, the greatest reduction occurred from SAI-before to SAI-after. In this larger trial with a higher TAI value, the biggest reduction occurred from TAI to SAI-before, greater than SAI-before to SAI-after. Curiously, we see that despite the differences in reduction patterns final SAI-after is both cases is actually very similar: 30.5 on the *Elizabethtown* screening and 31.5 on the single screening trials. Therefore, one is left to question if the reduction observed during the *Elizabethtown* trial is greater because TAI was higher in this group.

As already mentioned on the single screenings many of the adult volunteers on the *Elizabethtown* screening had written that they felt better after watching the movie, while all those who watched *Chocolate* wrote that they felt the same. Therefore, I was very curious to examine these female volunteers’ long answer questionnaires to see if the responses would be similar on the double trials. I was particularly curious because the discussion after the *Elizabethtown* screening had indicated that while the experience had been pleasant, the older members of the group had not really appeared to connect with *Elizabethtown*.

Table 14 Trial Six: Individual female STAI responses to watching *Elizabethtown*

Film Trial 6 - 20th January 2010 - Film <i>Elizabethtown</i> Female Table							
Age	ID	Sex	SAI bef	TAI	SAI after	Long answers – how volunteers rate the way they feel after watching the movie	Ref
46	F1	F	41	36	29	BETTER – I had fun	(Ap:69)
28	F2	F	33	50	38	SAME – because I’m fine	(Ap:70)
41	F4	F	50	57	36	Better/Same - Strange - The film made me think that life should be lived calmly	(Ap:72)
40	F7	F	41	34	29	SAME – I don’t mix films with real life	(Ap:75)

23	F9	F	29	38	28	BETTER - we should live with less stress	(Ap:77)
22	F10	F	28	46	24	SAME	(Ap:78)
22	F11	F	36	50	34	SAME – the film made her think that just because we fail once, we may not always fail. It reminded her that we shouldn't put off things that have to be said or done, because the opportunity might pass	(Ap:79)
34	F12	F	28	27	21	BETTER – It's a good humored film, it made me think that there's always another way to see things and sometimes an apparent ending might be a beginning.	(Ap:80)
28	F13	F	44	50	40	A LITTLE BETTER –more relaxed	(Ap:81)
23	F15	F	24	26	20	SAME – the film made her think that we shouldn't give up on life at the first obstacle.	(Ap:83)
30	F23 ^{14*}	F	30	63	26	SAME – sometimes we don't know how to deal with our failures in life	(Ap:91)
24	F24	F	39	37	32	BETTER. I thought about things. No one is a failure if they fight	(Ap:92)
39	F25*	F	58	61	48	BETTER – it made me think that even if our life is a failure we can still have the opportunity to be happy. I thought that it may not be worth fighting for a lost cause; but when a door closes, a window can open so we still have a chance to be happy.	(Ap:93)
30	F27	F	29	43	25	BETTER - we have to feel everything we get from life; easy and difficult; good and bad. Life is made up of instances and often experiences we ignore or consider insignificant can lead to great things	(Ap:95)
23	F28	F	35	46	46	SAME - even though it was fun it didn't change my state of mind	(Ap:96)
19	F29	F	25	45	25	SAME - I didn't change	(Ap:97)
35	F38	F	35	49	30	SAME – the film made me think of the unpredictability of life and the alternatives it sometimes presents.	(Ap:106)
29	F39 ^{15*}	F	62	53	48	BETTER	Oral response

¹⁴ The records with an* were not included in the calculation of the average tables because they had results in the high anxiety category.

¹⁵ At the end of this section, I will discuss the conversation with F39's in which she explained how watching *Elizabethtown* allowed her to come to terms with the very difficult circumstances she was living, following the recent death of her mother..

Of the eighteen volunteers, nine volunteers wrote that they felt the same after watching the movie, seven wrote that they felt better, one a little better and another “strange-somewhere between the same and better” (Ap: 72).

The outcomes of the trial were in keeping with the results of the single screenings, anxiety levels decrease when volunteers relax and enjoy the movie. Two volunteers, F1 and F13 (who wrote she felt a little better) attribute their improved state of mind to “having fun” and relaxing a little respectively (*cf.* Ap:68, 81). However, these were the only two volunteers on the *Elizabethtown* screening who used this explanation. Most volunteers attributed feeling better to new ideas they acquired from watching the movie and thinking about it. Again it became obvious when looking at volunteers’s statements that when they believed that they could transmit aspects of the film that they connected with to their own lives, they wrote that they felt better after watching the movie. It did not matter if they experienced significant alterations in STAI, as F25 and F39 (*cf.* Ap:93) illustrate, or small STAI change as demonstrated by F9 and F24 (*cf.* Ap:77, 92). However, again when volunteers feel that films and real life do not mix and that the ideas they liked in the film could not be transmitted to their real life, they wrote that they felt the same at the end of the trial despite reductions in STAI. F7’s and F28’s respective statements, “I don’t mix films with real life” and “even though it was fun it didn’t change my state of mind” are patent expressions of this sentiment (*cf.* Ap:75, 96).

This trial was also the first time that I saw large increases from TAI to SAI-before. This is particularly noticeable in the case of F1 (36;41;29) and F39 (53;62;48). While the increase from TAI to SAI-before is understandable in the case of F39’s bereavement, I wondered what had caused this in F1’s case. The discussion had revealed that many of the older volunteers had never been to the cinema before and I wondered if this might have influenced SAI-before anxiety levels. Therefore, I decided to add questions that enquired about what watching a movie meant to volunteers and how many films they watched a month, just to verify that the movie going experience was not stressful for some.

I was expectant to see how a similar group would react to watching *Chocolate*, which they did on 21st April 2010 from 7.00 – 10.15 p.m. 16 adult females participated in the *Chocolate* trial. Following good procedural practice, three sets of questionnaires were removed from the average calculations. Two H7 and H29 were excluded because

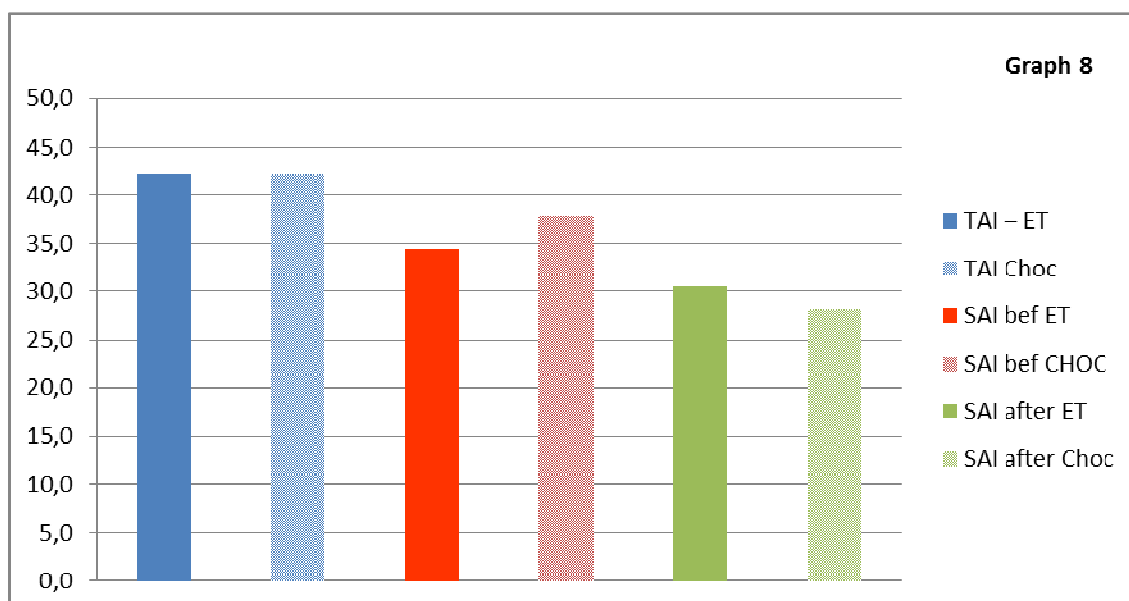
volunteers registered at least one score in the high anxiety category. However, their STAI responses are registered in the individual table and completed questionnaires can be found in the Appendix. H8 was excluded because this volunteer did not complete all the STAI questionnaires, just TAI and SAI-after, and she did not complete the open-answer, self-reporting questionnaire either. Therefore, her results are not recorded. A sample size of 13 was used to produce the *Chocolate* average tables presented below. Curiously, the TAI average was identical before both screenings which supports Spielberg and Silva's arguments. However, TAI averages were obtained from variable results in some cases, which will be discussed later.

Table 15 Trial Six: Average Female STAI results of *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate* screenings

Comparing average female values related to viewing <i>Elizabethtown</i> and <i>Chocolate</i> - scores 60 or over removed					
TAI – ET	TAI <i>Choc</i>	SAI bef ET	SAI bef <i>CHOC</i>	SAI after ET	SAI after <i>Choc</i>
42,3	42,3	34,5	37,9	30,5	28,1

A larger overall reduction of over 14 points was registered (42.3; 37.9; 28.1) in the *Chocolate* trial. This was achieved in a different manner to the *Elizabethtown* trial. In the *Elizabethtown* trial, the largest reduction in anxiety reading was registered from TAI to SAI-before (7.8 points) followed by a 4.4 point average decrease from SAI-before to SAI-after. However, in the *Chocolate* trial, the 4.4 drop occurred from TAI to SAI-before and this is followed by a very large 9.8 average decrease during the screening. Thus the greatest reaction, at the level of anxiety, is produced by watching the movie during the *Chocolate* trial and before in the *Elizabethtown* trial. In both cases the SAI-after is always the lowest score, but the average SAI-after scored as a result of watching *Chocolate* is one of the lowest values registered standing at only 28.1 points.

Graph 8 Trial Six: Average Female STAI results *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate* trials



In some ways I was not surprised at the better STAI reaction to *Chocolate*. During the screening of the movie, I observed many signs of recognition and recollection, on the part of volunteers, especially in scenes referring to the taboos associated with rural life. When collecting the questionnaires after the movie, volunteers told me they had really enjoyed it. Spontaneous discussions took place between teachers and students on the kind of follow-up work that could be done in the classroom, based on watching this movie. All of these factors led me to expect an increase in the number of “feel better” responses. However, only eight of the fifteen volunteers wrote that they felt better after watching *Chocolate*, while nine wrote that they felt the same. More significantly, most volunteers who wrote that they felt better after watching *Chocolate* ascribed this either to feeling more relaxed or because the film was fun and they enjoyed it. Only two participants on the *Elizabethtown* trial had given this answer for feeling better (cf. Ap:69, 81) The other answers had implied new ideas or alternative ways of thinking acquired from the film. There was little evidence of this type of connection with *Chocolate*, even though watching it had obviously been a fun and relaxing experience for these ladies. The long answer questionnaire also enquired about what watching a film meant to the volunteers. Most of the answers revolved around relaxation, pleasure and pastime and volunteers watched from one to six movies a month. Therefore, as they ascribed feeling better after watching *Chocolate* to their enjoyment of the film and subsequent relaxation, it seemed the film produced a relatively normal reaction in them.

Below is a table with female volunteers' individual responses. Questionnaires H8, H9 and H35 were not included in individual male and female tables, or average counts as the questionnaires were not properly completed. Also H27's and H29's results were not included in the calculation of female averages, because these volunteers scored one or more value in the high anxiety range. I had also considered excluding H7's readings, because the "59" TAI reading was just one point off the high score category. However, I decided to include H7 in the average calculation since there were other readings in the 50-score bracket, therefore it was not completely displaced from the body of other results. While I understand that volatile and extremely high results should be eliminated to create stable average tables, I felt these averages should also include representative samples of all sections of the target group. Therefore, as there was consistency across the three scores recorded by H7, and she was not isolated cases in her trial, I decided to include her values in the average calculations

Table 16 Trial Six: Individual female STAI responses to watching *Chocolate*

Film Trial 6 - 21st April 2010 - Film Chocolate- Female Table all scores included							
Age	ID	Sex	SAI before	TAI	SAI after	Long answers – how volunteers rate the way they feel after watching the movie	Reference
21	H1	F	31	38	28	BETTER - cos it's a fun film	(Ap:107)
47	H2	F	30	38	25	BETTER - the film was fun	(Ap:108)
19	H3	F	56	54	32	BETTER – I feel calm and relaxed	(Ap:109)
42	H7 ¹⁶ /F4*	F	48	59	48	SAME – relaxation, enjoyed watching film on making desserts	(Ap:113, 72)
40	H10/F7	F	37	36	31	SAME - no influence on personality	(Ap:114, 74)
23	H11/F9	F	42	48	25	BETTER - more relaxed	(Ap: 115, 77)
22	H12/F11	F	41	35	28	SAME – fun film	(Ap: 116, 79)
36	H13	F	35	50	25	SAME – relaxation	(Ap:117)
28	H14/F13	F	45	50	30	SAME – had fun, enjoyed the film	(Ap: 118, 81)
31	H16	F	26	34	22	BETTER – relaxed	(Ap:120)
24	H18	F	20	28	22	SAME – I don't think the film changed me physically or psychologically	(Ap:122)
23	H23	F	41	49	33	BETTER - it's a fun film	(Ap:128)
31	H27/F23* ¹⁷	F	45	60	35	SAME – however, she wrote that when she watches a film that she finds interesting, she forgets all her problems	(Ap:132, 91)
30	H28	F	27	35	32	SAME – calm and relaxed	(Ap:133)
39	H29/F25 ^{18*}	F	77	71	77	SAME – because a film is fiction, even though it may portray things that happen in real life. Watching a film normally represents peace and tranquility.	(Ap:134, 93)
21	H30	F	50	52	35	BETTER – I feel so much more relaxed	(Ap:135)
29	H38	F	39	38	26	BETTER- it was very relaxing	(Ap:142)

¹⁶ When the same volunteer did both trials I added both reference numbers to the table.

¹⁷ Not included in the calculation of average table because one score fit into the high anxiety category.

¹⁸ Not included in the calculation of average table because one score fit into the high anxiety category.

So, in the case of the female trial, one can conclude that watching *Chocolate* reduced anxiety levels and made viewers feel better because it helped them to relax. The scenario of the film was familiar to them, so it comforted them but it did not give them new coping skills or challenge conventional wisdom. However, watching *Elizabethtown* had offered different opportunities to some volunteers. Volunteers' long answers on the *Elizabethtown* screening seemed to indicate that while some felt better after watching it because it offered fun and relaxation, most felt better because it provided them with new ideas and perspectives which they felt they could use in their own lives.

Another point that I consider worth mentioning is that while some ideas were repeated, no long answer questionnaire was identical. This fact emphasized the notion that while the movie going experience may share common features, by its very nature it is always a unique and individual activity. While part of the experience may depend on the viewer, another part also depends on the film as can be seen by the general trends observed in the reactions to *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate*.

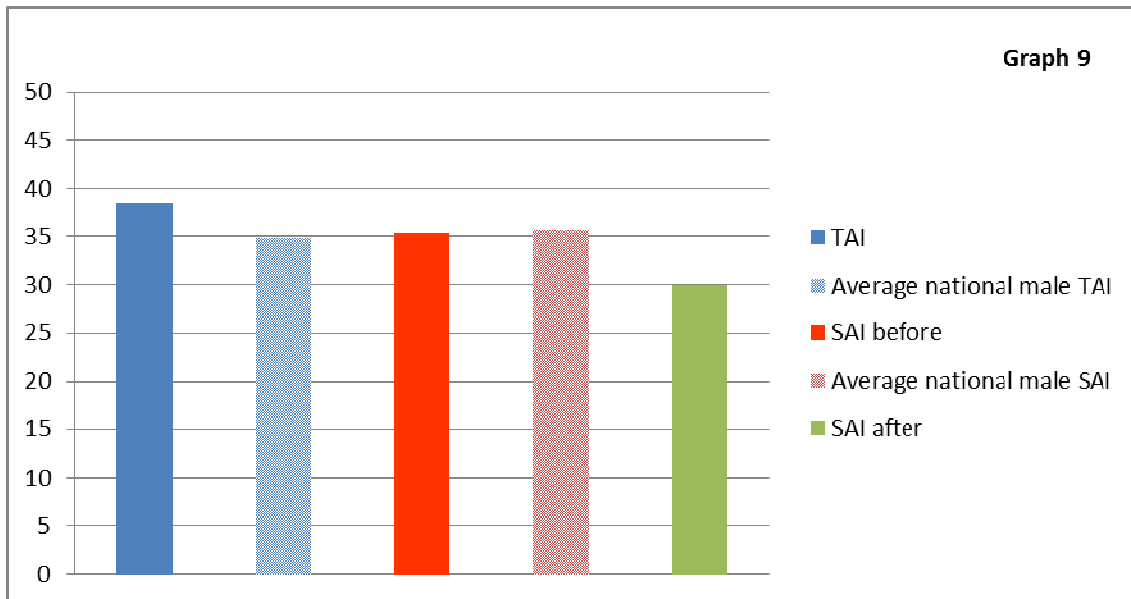
Having reviewed the females responses on this group screening, it is now time to analyse the male results. The total male sample size was 21 on the *Chocolate* screening. One set of questionnaires was removed because all the scores fell in the high anxiety range. Therefore, the averages produced below were derived from a sample of twenty.

Table 17 Trial Six: Average male STAI results on *Elizabethtown* screening and compared to national averages

Film Trial 6 - 20th January 2010 - Film <i>Elizabethtown</i>				
Male averages high values removed				
Group TAI	Average Male TAI	Average male SAI	SAI before	SAI after
38,5	34,8	35,6	35,3	30

Overall reductions were smaller than in the female *Elizabethtown* screening. The average decrease from TAI to SAI-after was 8.5 points. A 3.2 point drop occurred from TAI to SAI-before and the final 5.3 drop occurred during the course of the screening, thus the male sample followed a different pattern to the female.

Graph 9 Trial Six: Average male STAI results on *Elizabethtown* screening and compared to national averages



Comparing the trial figures to Silva’s standardized averages, it is easy to see that trial TAI is slightly higher than the standard value, trial SAI-before is very similar to Silva’s value and SAI-after is significantly lower.

Examining longer answers we see that ten male volunteers wrote that they felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* and the other ten wrote that they felt the same. The answers summarised in the table below verify that the desire to carry positive ideas from the movie into real life was determinant in feeling better after watching it. This is illustrated by F3’s (*cf.* Ap:71), F6’s (*cf.* Ap:74), F20’s (*cf.* Ap:87) and F26’s (*cf.* Ap:94) answers. Other volunteers, F30 (*cf.* Ap:98), F32 (*cf.* Ap:100), F33 (*cf.* Ap:101) and F34 (*cf.* Ap:102) also wrote they felt better after watching *Elizabethtown*. Curiously, the latter group ascribed this change of heart to merely enjoying the movie. This feeling is not always paralleled in STAI changes because though F32 and F34 experienced significant decreases, this did not happen in the other cases. Thus in this trial we also see two distinct reasons for feeling better after watching *Elizabethtown*, the belief that positive ideas can be transmitted from the film to real life was one reason and relaxation another.

Table 18 Trial Six: Individual male responses to *Elizabethtown* screening

Film Trial 6 - 20th January 2010 - Film <i>Elizabethtown</i> Male Table							
Age	ID	Sex	SAI bef	TAI	SAI after	Long answers – how volunteers rate the way they feel after watching the movie	Reference
26	F3	M	50	40	23	BETTER – because even when things seem really bad they can have a positive side	(Ap:71)
20	F5	M	39	35	42	BETTER – I have no reason, no concrete thoughts, but I feel strangely better	(Ap:72)
20	F6	M	27	42	25	BETTER – because the film made me see things in a positive light	(Ap:74)
32	F8	M	28	34	22	SAME – because I am a calm person	(Ap:76)
30	F14*	M	67	68	66	SAME – but I loved the story	(Ap:82)
21	F16	M	31	30	27	SAME -	(Ap:84)
23	F17	M	38	49	33	SAME – I also think my life does not have much of a future	(Ap:85)
55	F18	M	30	25	28	SAME	(Ap:86)
18	F19	M	24	37	24	SAME	(Ap:87)
18	F20	M	31	41	27	BETTER it showed me we can be ok even if a lot of bad things happen	(Ap:88)
34	F21	M	51	42	54	SAME - a film does not change our lives	(Ap:89)
55	F22	M	29	24	24	SAME	(Ap:90)
20	F26	M	41	41	24	BETTER – the film made me think about life and I feel calmer	(Ap:94)
50	F30	M	41	41	33	BETTER - it's light and we can enjoy it	(Ap:98)
28	F31	M	31	28	25	SAME it didn't change my state of mind	(Ap:99)
19	F32	M	24	41	20	BETTER - because it had a happy ending	(Ap:100)
32	F33	M	47	54	48	BETTER - it's a lovely story	(Ap:101)
23	F34	M	41	42	24	BETTER – because it's a happy film	(Ap:102)
27	F35	M	34	49	28	SAME – anxiety, sadness and joy were the adjectives he used to describe his feelings while watching the movie.	(Ap:103)
20	F36	M	38	40	34	BETTER	(Ap:104)
28	F37	M	30	34	34	SAME – I have already learned that you need to dedicate time and effort to obtain success	(Ap:105)

*not included in the average tables because of high readings.

On the other hand, F21(*cf.*Ap:89) and F31(*cf.*Ap:99) wrote they felt the same after watching *Elizabethtown* because they feel watching a film cannot change their lives. This kind of thinking again appears to block the ability to feel better after watching a movie, independent of changes in state anxiety levels. F21's STAI readings remained quite constant in the medium range, while F31's decreased significantly.

Conversely F5 write that he felt better after watching *Elizabethtown*, despite a slight increase in SAI and not understanding why he feels better. Despite a 7-point increase from TAI to SAI-after and a steady increase pattern from TAI to SAI-before to SAI-after, F5 (35; 39; 42) wrote that he felt better after watching *Elizabethtown*. Curiously he could not explain why.

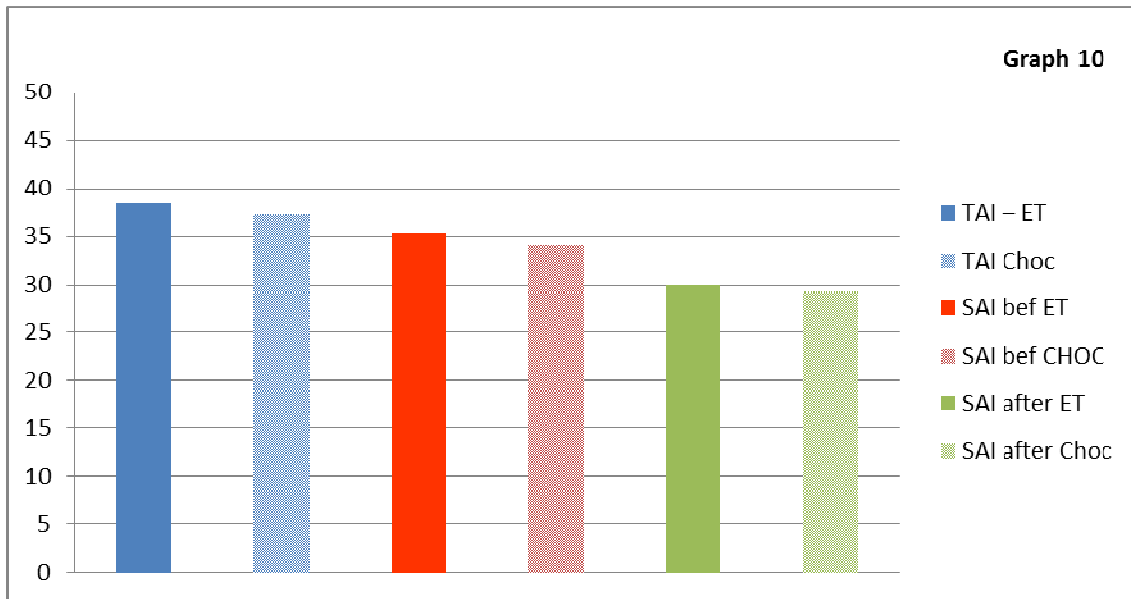
When the group's results were analysed after watching *Chocolate* on 21st April similar results and paths were observed. Twenty male volunteers took part in this trial. However as two did not complete all the questionnaires and one, H15, registered anxiety scores in the high range, only seventeen questionnaires were used to generate average values. H15's STAI results are recorded on Table 19 and his long answer questionnaire is in the Appendix (*cf.* AP:119). An overall 7.9 point decrease was registered from TAI to SAI-after (37.3; 34.1; 29.4). All average anxiety readings recorded including the TAI result were slightly lower, but the reduction pattern was similar on both trials. A 3.2 point reduction was registered from TAI to SAI-before, followed by a 4.5 drop during the course of the trial. The SAI-after scores on both trials were very similar with the *Chocolate* average, just 0.6 points below the first. So, from a STAI perspective, the two viewings were similar for male volunteers.

Table 19 Trial Six: Average male STAI results related to *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate* screenings

Comparing average male values related to viewing <i>Elizabethtown</i> and <i>Chocolate</i> – scores 60 or over removed n=18					
TAI – ET	TAI <i>Choc</i>	SAI bef ET	SAI bef <i>CHOC</i>	SAI after ET	SAI after <i>Choc</i>
38,5	37,3	35,3	34,1	30	29,4

The table and graph were produced by a sample of twenty viewers in the *Elizabethtown* screening and eighteen volunteers in the *Chocolate* screening.

Graph 10 Trial Six: Average female STAI results related to *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate* screenings



When the individual questionnaires are examined, in most cases the SAI-after figures are lower than TAI and if there is an increase, as occurs in the case of H21 (*cf.* Ap:126) and H22 (*cf.* Ap:127) this is very slight. While the long answers on the *Elizabethtown* screening revealed that 10 volunteers felt the same and the other ten felt better after viewing the movie, on the *Chocolate* screening 10 volunteers wrote they felt the same, while only 8 wrote that they felt better.

Table 20 Trial Six: Individual male responses to *Chocolate* screening

Film Trial 6 - 21st April 2010 - Film Chocolate- Male Table all scores included							
Age	ID	Sex	SAI before	TAI	SAI after	Long answers – how volunteers rate the way they feel after watching the movie	Reference
25	H4	M	32	44	22	BETTER- the moment of leisure allowed me to relax	(Ap:110)
26	H5/F3	M	44	43	30	SAME I had seen the movie before	(Ap:111, 70)
36	H6	M	29	36	26	BETTER-confirmed my thinking that society should not exclude others – we shouldn't judge other	(Ap:112)
30	H15/F14*	M	69	65	63	BETTER – felt comfortable after watching the movie	(Ap: 119, 71)
45	H17	M	47	40	31	BETTER – got rid of worries of working day	(Ap:121)
	H19	M	24	50	42	BETTER - I laughed a lot, so I felt better	(Ap:123)
23	H20/F17	M	36	43	29	SAME - films don't influence me	(Ap:124, 84)
55	H21/F18	M	28	23	27	SAME I am concentrating as I was at the beginning of the movie	(Ap:125, 85)
18	H22	M	26	24	26	SAME – I haven't changed	(Ap:127)

	H24	M	35	31	26	SAME – the movie deals with recurrent issues	(Ap:129)
29	H25	M	35	35	25	BETTER – relieved the stress of a day's work	(Ap:130)
55	H26/F22	M	25	20	20	SAME – watching a movie is like going to a football match or eating chocolate for me	(Ap:131, 89)
29	H31/F31	M	31	30	29	SAME	(Ap:136, 98)
37	H32	M	42	33	24	BETTER – the film made me think of peace and love revolving around chocolate	(Ap:137)
20	H33	M	34	48	29	SAME – but a little calmer	(Ap:138)
32	H34/F33	M	45	51	47	SAME – but watching films is a fun activity	(Ap:139, 100)
23	H36	M	47	43	30	BETTER - I liked it, relaxing moment.	(Ap:140)
27	H37/F35	M	26	42	35	BETTER- it was a happy movie and I relaxed.	(Ap:141, 102)

The long answers on this trial demonstrate that volunteers felt better after watching *Chocolate* either because it allowed them to relax, as can be seen in the case of H4, H6, H17 and H25. H32 wrote that he felt better after watching the movie because “it speaks about peace and love developed around chocolate” (AP:137) H36 stated that he had simply “liked the movie (Ap:140). H19 wrote that he felt better after watching *Chocolate* because “it had made him smile a lot, and he felt better as a natural consequence of this” (Ap:123). Again, one of the reasons why some volunteers felt the same after watching a movie was because they did not think this could influence their lives in a concrete fashion and this was the case for H20, H22 and H26.

H37 (42; 26; 35) offers a case that it is worth commenting. He registered a major 16-point reduction from TAI to SAI-before, but the SAI reading actually increased by 9 points during the course of the screening. Still, he wrote that he felt better and he ascribed this feeling to the fact that he had relaxed while he watched this happy film (*cf.* Ap:141). Therefore, as registered earlier in C18's (42; 31; 37), C26's (37; 31; 35) and C27's (44; 24; 31) questionnaires, increases in state anxiety level are not always reflected in deteriorating emotional state.

Though this type of result, where STAI questionnaires indicate an increase in state anxiety but volunteers write they feel better, does not represent the standard reaction, it occurred with enough consistency to make me wonder if physically, the anxiety and emotional responses were processed by different systems. Though these systems normally coincided this may not be a mandatory response. I was further

supported in this thinking when I looked at H37's reaction to *Elizabethtown*, where the same volunteer was given the designation: F35. The evolution from TAI to SAI-before and SAI-after followed a different pattern (49; 34; 28), and reduction in state anxiety level was maintained throughout the screening. However, F35/H37 actually wrote that he felt the same after watching *Elizabethtown*, despite the fact that STAI questionnaires indicated a continued reduction in state anxiety readings. Perhaps, this emotional state can be understood when one sees that he wrote that he felt "anxiety, sadness, joy" during and after watching *Elizabethtown* (cf. Ap:102), while he considered watching *Chocolate* "a moment of relaxation" (Ap:141). Also, he was more relaxed at the beginning of the *Chocolate* screening.

In general on this trial, it can be said that despite the fact that volunteers preferred *Chocolate* to *Elizabethtown*, state anxiety levels dropped consistently during the course of both screenings. SAI-after average scores were the lowest of all readings. In this sample male anxiety level reduction followed a similar pattern from TAI to SAI-before to SAI- after, with the latter always being the greatest. On the other hand, the female anxiety response varied with the film both in distribution and extent. However, despite this variation the SAI-after average value was quite constant. Female state anxiety levels dropped significantly in both cases but the greatest decrease occurred from TAI to SAI-before in the *Elizabethtown* screening, while watching the actual movie on the *Chocolate* screening produced the greatest reduction. Also, the overall decrease was much sharper on the *Chocolate* screening. This finding is in keeping with Spielberg's observation when testing the accuracy SAI scales: "females are more emotionally liable than males in their reactions to highly stressful or relaxing circumstances" (Spielberger 1983: 44).

Significantly, similar percentages of viewers of each sex wrote they felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate*. Long answers revealed that volunteers who watched *Chocolate* wrote they felt better at the end of the screening because they enjoyed the movie and it helped them relax. Therefore, I think it is possible to propose that the reduction in state anxiety registered in *Chocolate* screening is largely due to relaxation, the antithesis of anxiety. However, while some male and female participants accredited their better state of mind to enjoyment and relaxation after watching *Elizabethtown*, other answers while referring to enjoyment and fun also indicated that the movie had transmitted new, alternative and more positive ideas to volunteers, giving them new ways of looking at situations. These answers also indicated that volunteers

felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* because they felt they could transfer the concepts in the movie to their thinking and conceptual processes. In both instances volunteers who wrote they felt better after watching a movie, normally also experienced a significant reduction in STAI readings, but this was not always the case. On the other hand, other viewers wrote they felt the same after watching a movie, because they separate the movie-going experience from their “real” life and do not see the possibility of transference between these two. This was verified even in cases where there was a marked reduction from TAI to SAI-after.

Thus, we can conclude that while similar results were obtained both in STAI and sentiments during both screenings and the STAI pattern appears to be due to similar factors, and some volunteers felt better after watching both films because they enjoyed them, had fun and relaxed; others felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* for different reasons. Connecting with *Elizabethtown* gave them new perspectives and even coping skills. Thus, as occurred in trial five, watching each film appears to offer a different experience.

Trial six also offered some unexpected information about trait anxiety and its stability. Because only some volunteers who had taken part in the *Elizabethtown* screening also watched *Chocolate*, at the beginning of the second screening I thought it was advisable to ask all participants to complete the TAI questionnaire to avoid the risk of overlooking any participant, even if TAI readings are suppose to be stable for long periods in life, it should not have been necessary to repeat the TAI questionnaire before doing a second screening. This meant that some volunteers filled in the TAI questionnaire twice within a short period of time. In most cases there was a close correspondence between the TAI readings as exemplified by H7/F4 – 59/57, H27/F23 – 60/63 and H10/F7 – 36/34, as Spielberg had predicted. However, in others there was a significant difference as exemplified by H29/F25 - 71/61 and H11/F9 – 48/38. I discussed these findings with Keith Oatley, former Director of the Cognitive Psychology Program at the University of Toronto, because over the last twenty years, he has studied the influence of adversity on emotional disorders such as depression and on human emotions more generally. When I asked, if the alterations registered in TAI over such a short period were plausible, he informed me that traumatic real life events, such as divorce or unemployment, can and in many cases do affect trait anxiety levels:

As to the variation in STAI readings over time, I think the issue with all these scales, indeed with psychological measurement generally, is that the measure is not the

phenomenon, just a reflection of it, with a good deal of error in it. Also, one might expect some leakage from state-like self-report symptoms into trait-like self-report symptoms with a severe life event such as a divorce (one of the most severe of such events). The area of severe life events is something on which I have worked, and I think that it would be surprising if there were not some effect on trait measures during such events: the whole being is affected, so one might expect this. In addition, the beginning of diagnosable clinical anxiety disorders such as agoraphobia often occurs with life events of the kind your subject was suffering. I think your result [alteration in trait anxiety levels over a short period of time] is explicable. (Oatley: 2010a)

On further online discussion of the subject, Oatley recommended that I triangulate the results from the longer answer questionnaires with the psychometric scales to try to build a clearer picture of circumstances and thinking patterns that were producing the results observed in order to get a clearer picture of what was happening in participants' lives and minds:

As to the relation between severe life events and trait anxiety

[...] One kind of underlying point relevant to your studies is that questionnaires are not accurate measures. They are popular with psychologists because they are easy to use. But they are a bit like measuring the width of a piece of paper with a rubber band. They produce a good deal of error of measurement. Psychologically, they give an indication of the underlying concept, in which you are interested, but not the concept itself. For instance, the far-more-time-consuming and expensive semi-structured interviews (which tend to be used in life event research, which Brown and Harris introduced) are much informative; you move towards something more like this in your statement of the longer answer sheet [I had asked advise on my open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires].

[...] As to the two cases you mention [I had written to Professor Oatley to ask his opinion on A3's and F25/H29's results because I was most concerned about these two situations], I think what you have to do is to regard the information you got from the subjects' accounts and from their scores on the STAI as two different ways of working towards what you are interested in (two different kinds of measure), neither of them definitive, but both together allowing you, as it were, to triangulate what you are interested in. (Oatley: 2010b)

Unfortunately, I was no longer working with A3's class, so I could not repeat the SAI questionnaire with her, but taking Oatley's, advise I reviewed F25/H29's longer answers to see if I could identify anything that might indicate a change in her attitude. When F25/H29 watched *Elizabethtown* as F25 (61, 58, 48) there was a significant reduction from TAI to SAI-after and she wrote that she felt better after watching the movie because "even if our life is a failure we can still have the opportunity to be happy. I thought that it may not be worth fighting for a lost cause; but when a door closes, a window can open so we still have a chance to be happy." (Ap: 93). Despite a strong indication of living through a troubled time, with her reference to live as a

failure, in her answer there is hope and an anticipation of the possibility of a happy future. She seems to be able to carry thoughts from *Elizabethtown* over into her real life. But her answers later as H29 (71; 77; 77) are very different. She wrote that she felt the same after watching *Chocolate* because: “a film is only a film, even though it may portray things that happen in real life.” (Ap:134) Previously, I would have attributed this change of attitude to the film only, but results considering Oatley’s comments, I reconsidered the possibility that real life events could influence anxiety levels even during the screenings. As such I wondered if her real life circumstances were not contributing to her inability to see beyond her immediate circumstances as her response, “a film is only a film” implied.

This new idea was very important and influenced both my expectations from the free associative trials and orientation of the STAI application. Up to this point, I had followed Spielberg and Silva’s model, which proposed that TAI will be constant over long periods. Under normal circumstances, I believe this still holds true. However, Oatley’s suggestions led me to consider that if TAI can be affected negatively by traumatic real world events, perhaps it can react positively to one’s understanding and comprehension oneself as may occur during free associative film analysis. I also considered this idea because Anna, the free associative film criticism volunteer presented in Chapter Two, had planted the seeds for this question when she completed the STAI questionnaires for the first time in January 2010. After seeing her STAI results, she had asked if TAI could change if one made peace with one’s identity theme. With the knowledge I had at the time, I responded that TAI was constant throughout life, but that one learned to deal with it as part of one’s identity theme. However, her question remained in my mind and I began to wonder if TAI would respond positively to increased awareness and acceptance of self.

In January 2010, when Anna completed the STAI questionnaires before and after watching *Elizabethtown*, I had no evidence or anticipation of variance in TAI, but the alterations registered later by H11 and H29 made me reconsider Anna’s question. Following this discovery, I resolved to repeat the TAI questionnaires in the following double trial. Unfortunately, I did not have these results when the second screening of trial five took place, so I did not repeat the TAI questionnaire with participants. However, I repeated the TAI questionnaire with the all volunteers who participated in trial seven, with Anna (Chapter Two) Anita (Chapter Four) and A3, A4 and A9.

Another point became evident when we look at the complete tables: “normal” groups can hide dramatic conditions, as illustrated by H29 (71; 77; 77), H15 (65; 69; 63) and even H27 (60; 45; 35). If these three cases were included in the calculation of averages, scores increase dramatically. I understand the need to remove them for statistical purposes, but these cases cannot be ignored as they are the ones that need the most immediate assistance. Their presence put a face to the statistics I presented at the beginning of this chapter. It made me think even more that education systems should incorporate elements that could help regular students like H15, H27 and H29 learn to deal with their high levels of state and/or trait anxiety. I also reminded me to take nothing for granted when dealing with school groups.

Finally, I would like to end this review of trial six by presenting F39’s story (53; 62; 48), because I consider that this demonstrates poignantly how a fictional narrative that a reader or a viewer connects with can offer a path for the future. F39 participated in the *Elizabethtown* screen. She completed the STAI questionnaires with the others but asked if she could speak to me after the trial, rather than filling out the open-answer, self-reporting questionnaire. F39 told me that she was not a member of the adult education program, but a volunteer in the cultural centre. She had done the trial because the manager of the cultural centre knew the film and had recommended she participate in the trial. He thought that it might help overcome a very difficult personal situation. Her mother had died a few days before, after a difficult and protracted illness and she was trying to come to terms with life on her own, as she did not have a relationship with her father and did not really have any other close family. She told me that watching the film touched her so deeply that she wanted to transmit this, but that she had not been to write what she felt while watching it.

F39 told me watching the movie had made things better, had made her think there could be a future after her mother’s death. The celebration of Mitch’s life as part of the memorial, reminded her of happier times too, her mother’s sense of fun despite her illness and the things people had done for her, including an impromptu concert at the closing stages of this illness. Seeing the memorial service performed as it was in *Elizabethtown*, had also offered her hope and a certain plan for the future because it gave her a visual image of some ways her mother would have wanted to be remembered. While watching Drew driving with his father’s ashes on the road trip they had planned to make together while Mitch was alive, F39 actually felt a certain happiness because she had been able to make her own “road trip” with her mother while

she was still alive. Her mother had been born in Africa, but had never been able to return once she had come to live in Portugal. F39 brought her home, when she was already ill but still well enough to travel. They had held hands on the plane and she felt her mother's hand in hers when Drew caressed his father's urn. The trip had been very expensive for them but Drew could only drive with his father's ashes, so F39 was happy that she and her mother had actually travelled together. She told me that she had cried tears of release, not sorrow, many times during the film. She felt she had shared her pain with others; even if they were onscreen characters, they expressed her grief and in the darkened room she had felt that she had heard other sniffles. She did not know who the snifflers were but they too shared her grief. As she watched the movie, sometimes she laughed and cried at the same time and this made her realize that happiness can be mixed with grief and maybe even hope.

F39's story made me think of so many things, not least the peace and hope she found in the middle of her suffering by connecting with a relevant film. It also made me think of the seemingly incomprehensible, but normally rewarded, expectations that people who love books and films place on their capacity to heal hearts and expand lives. The cultural center manager had told her about the trial and encouraged her to do it because he hoped that it would help her. His attitude reminded me of the teacher in trial two, who wanted his students to see a film that could give them new perspectives. Both had looked to film to perform a very difficult task and were confirmed in their expectations.

3.3.3 Trial Seven – group trial where different types of films were screened

Trial seven occurred between 26th March and 19th October 2010. The trial was carried out by high school students studying in the visual arts area. Volunteers aged between 16 and 18 watched *Elizabethtown* on 26th March 2010 and *Good* on 19th October 2010. As the dates indicate, the screenings spanned two academic years because of scheduling difficulties. I do not consider that this interfered with the trial as most of the same students participated in each screening. The trial was coordinated internally by the philosophy and art teachers. The first trial took place in a classroom with a computer and video projector, the second in a small amphitheatre that had been fitted with computer and video projector for the occasion.

Volunteers in trial seven watched *Elizabethtown* and *Good* because I wanted to see how STAI results and sentiments would react to watching different types of movies. Up until this trial, average SAI readings had always reduced during the screening, and a significant number of volunteers wrote that they felt better after watching the movies. Only two volunteers had written that they felt worse after watching one of the movies selected. However, on the previous trials volunteers had always watched engaging narratives transmitting positive ideas. I wondered what would happen if they watched a movie that played on the fragility of human nature and did not have a positive outcome. I sought a film that would challenge its audience, but did not contain much on-screen physical violence. Spielberg's trials had shown that explicit physical violence raises SAI and I did not want the results to be clouded by this reaction. Thus, I selected Vicente Amorin's film *Good* (2009) based on C.P. Taylor's play of the same name.

Set in Germany during the second half of the 1930s and beginning of the 40s, it unravels the story of two Germans, Halder and his Jewish friend Maurice. When the story begins the former is an intelligent but harassed university professor with a chaotic and stifling home life including a neurotic wife, demanding young children, an elderly ill mother and an overpowering father-in-law. The latter is a sophisticated and confident bachelor. Maurice an acclaimed psychoanalytic with a busy practice is Halder's intellectual equal and confidant. Their friendship extends back to their youth when they served together in the German army during the final stages of World War I.

The film follows their changing fates as it develops against the backdrop of Hitler's rise to power and Nazi Germany's extermination program against the Jews. Maurice is initially shunned and then castigated by the regime. However Halder rises to prominence as his recently published novel, where euthanasia is practiced, is exploited

by the Reich's propaganda machine. He responds positively and naively to his new-found recognition. He is shyly exhilarated by his success, and a virile new home-life quickly helps him overcome his initial moral hesitation. The film shows how a good man can sanction terrible things when he does not really think about his actions. It ends portraying Halder's descent into madness as he realizes the consequences of his acts. There is little onscreen physical violence, but the viewer is continually faced with the professor's various moral dilemmas.

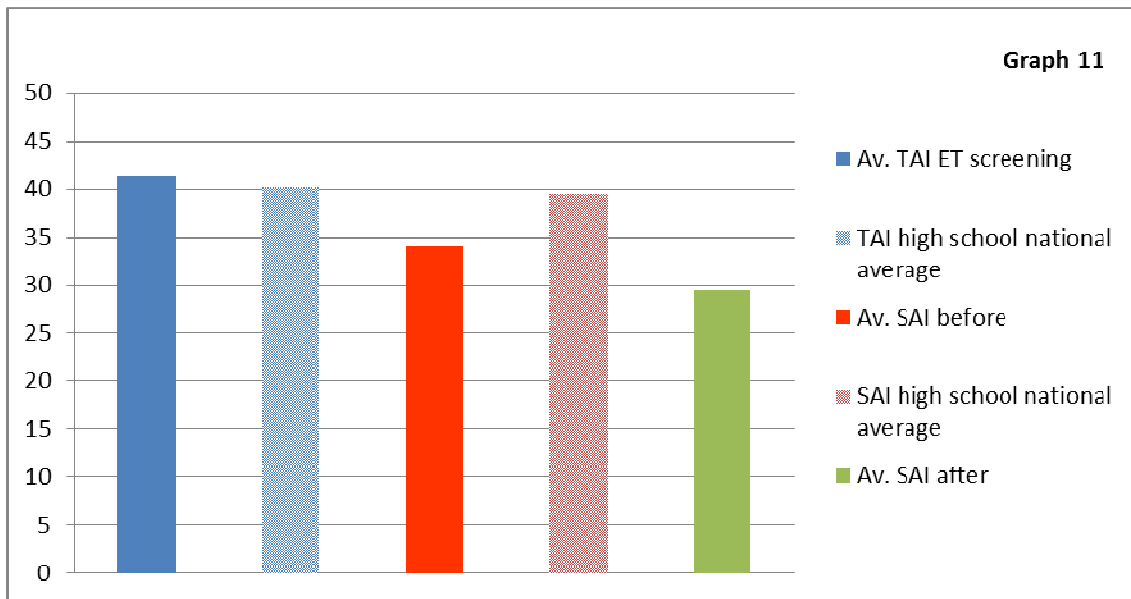
In terms of sequencing, we decided to show *Elizabethtown* in the first screening to establish if this group reacted in a similar fashion to other volunteer groups. Then I would evaluate their reaction to *Good*. As in previous trials we discussed films and I explained the difference between fear and anxiety and trait and state anxiety. Then volunteers filled in the SAI and TAI questionnaires at the beginning of the screening and repeated the SAI at the end. The *Elizabethtown* screening was projected using a computer and a video projector in a regular classroom. The local coordinator pointed out that students were doing second period evaluations for the grades. This is normally a stressful time as these grades are very important for the calculation of final averages. However, it was the only time that was available for the screening. Unfortunately, there was a slight delay at the beginning and not all volunteers completed the long answer questionnaire at the end. Male and female results of the *Elizabethtown* screening will be presented separately. As the female group was the largest, these results will be presented first.

Table 21 Trial Seven: Average female STAI results related to *Elizabethtown* screening

Female STAI results related to the screening of <i>Elizabethtown</i> 26 th March 2010 n=15				
Av. TAI ET screening	TAI high school average	SAI high school average	Av. SAI before	Av. SAI after
41,3	40,2	39,5	34,1	29,5

Despite the adverse timing of the trial, students reacted well to *Elizabethtown* and an overall 11.8 point decrease was registered from TAI to SAI-after (41.3; 34.1; 29.5) with a 7.2 reduction registered from TAI to SAI-before followed by a further 4.6 decrease registered during the course of the screening. Again the STAI averages for high school students were included to offer a standard reference. Though this is just a bench marking exercise, one can see that this group's TAI is quite close to Silva's average (Silva & Spielberg 2007: 16).

Graph 11 Average female STAI results related to *Elizabethtown* screening



The reductive pattern of watching *Elizabethtown* is maintained, with the 11.8 overall reduction similar to that of trial six. Also, when the long answer questionnaires were examined, it can be observed that volunteers who felt that the ideas in the movie could not be transferred to their own lives felt the same at the end of the trial as occurred with G7 (*cf.* Ap:147), G8 (*cf.* (Ap: 148) and G12 (*cf.*Ap:152), despite reductions in anxiety levels. Those who felt the message was transferrable to their lives wrote they felt better after watching the movies, as in the case of G2 (*cf.*Ap:143), and G15 (*cf.*Ap:153) and G19 (*cf.* Ap:156). There were also cases of volunteers who felt better after the trial because of the relaxation quality of the experience, for example G10 (50, 46, 45) who commented that she felt better because it was a nice story that left her in a good mood (*cf.*Ap:150). Volunteers' individual results can be seen in table 22 below. There are no references for the volunteers who did not complete the open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires because I cannot duplicate their STAI questionnaires for licencing reasons.

Table 22 Trial Seven: Individual female STAI responses to *Elizabethtown* screening

Results based on viewing of <i>Elizabethtown</i> 26th March 2010 Female Table						
ID	Sex	SAI bef	TAI	SAI after	Long answers – how volunteers rate the way they feel after watching the movie	Reference
G1	F	25	29	21	DID NOT ANSWER	-
G2	F	38	50	27	BETTER	(Ap:143)
G3	F	39	47	31	BETTER – the film showed me that live, in general is good, we have to know how to enjoy it and pay less attention to bad things.	(Ap:144)
G4	F	22	48	21	DID NOT ANSWER	_____
G5	F	22	27	20	BETTER – I got to know another story and I love stories.	(Ap:145)
G7	F	29	47	30	SAME – because watching a movie is a break from regular routines; but when it is over the routine begins again	(Ap:147)
G8	F	30	29	24	SAME – because it is only fiction	(Ap:148)
G10	F	46	50	45	BETTER – it is a nice story that leaves us in a good mood	(Ap:150)
G12	F	50	55	44	SAME- the film did not affect me much psychologically	(Ap:152)
G13	F	29	30	22	DID NOT ANSWER	_____
G14	F	44	36	41	DID NOT ANSWER	_____
G15	F	35	45	28	BETTER – watching a movie always allows us to think a little about ourselves, our stories; we compare our choices to the characters’	(Ap:153)
G18	F	34	37	34	DID NOT ANSWER	_____
G19	F	43	46	30	BETTER – the film transmitted a positive spirit	(Ap:156)
G20	F	25	44	24	SAME	(Ap:157)

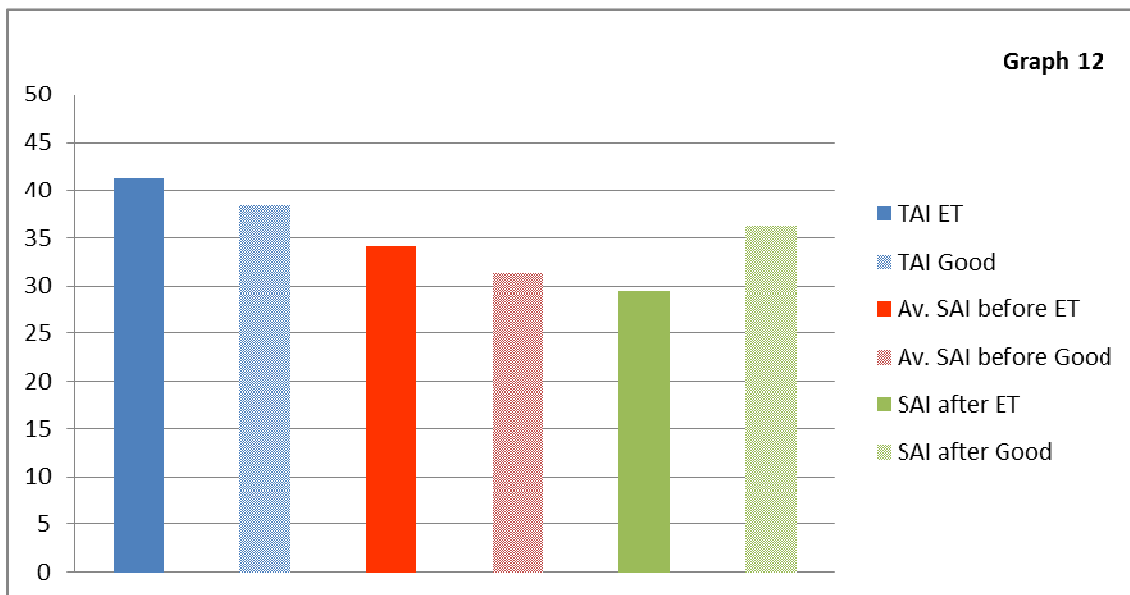
Very different results were recorded in the *Good* screening, which took place on 19th October 2010 from 8,30 to 11,30 a.m. The trial was carried out in the school auditorium and did not coincide with evaluation periods. Therefore, students were both comfortably seated and relaxed. Volunteers repeated both SAI and TAI questionnaires at the beginning of this trial as there were some new students. Also, the screening was interrupted for a 15-minute interval at 10.00 a.m.

Table 23 Trial Seven: Average female STAI results on *Elizabethtown* and *Good* screenings

Female STAI results comparing screening of <i>Elizabethtown</i> and <i>Good</i> (19 th October 2010 n=16)					
TAI ET	TAI <i>Good</i>	Av. SAI before ET	Av. SAI before <i>Good</i>	SAI after ET	SAI after <i>Good</i>
41,3	38,4	34,1	31,4	29,5	36,3

As can be seen in the above table, both SAI-before and TAI are lower at the beginning of the *Elizabethtown* screening. However the SAI readings change quite dramatically during the course of the viewing with a significant 4.9 average increase registered. Average SAI-after viewing *Good* is 6.8 points higher than the average score after viewing *Elizabethtown*, even though SAI was 2.7 points lower at the beginning of the trial. Therefore, for this sample, at least, it is possible to say that state anxiety levels were affected negatively by watching *Good*. Still average SAI-after readings are still slightly lower than average TAI.

Graph 12 Trial Seven: Average female STAI results recorded on *Elizabethtown* and *Good* screenings



The *Good* screening was the first time that an average increase in SAI was registered during the course of a screening. Curiously when talking to students at the end of the screening, many commented that had felt this was a better movie than *Elizabethtown*, which they had considered a little frivolous. Most said that they had enjoyed *Good*, even though parts of it made them uncomfortable because they felt they had seen something meaningful on this occasion. A summary of their individual reactions is recorded in table 24 below.

Table 24 Trial Seven: Individual female STAI results recorded on *Good* screening

Results based on viewing of <i>Good</i> 19th October 2010 Female Table						
ID	Sex	SAI bef	TAI	SAI after	Long answers – how volunteers rate the way they feel after watching the movie	Reference
J1/G1	F	24	31	35	WORSE	(Ap:158)
J2/G2	F	46	56	43	BETTER – we shouldn't feel bad, for not reaching an objective, especially if we are sure we couldn't have done anything about it.	(Ap:159, 143)
J3/G3	F	35	37	41	WORSE – the film brings us in contact with a lot of violence and makes us think about the suffering “men” cause each other	(Ap:160, 144)
J4/G4	F	23	48	25	WORSE – I found the film a little shocking and it opened my eyes to a very cruel reality	(Ap:161)
J5/G5	F	28	26	27	BETTER – I feel more informed, I feel I learned about a very important concept for this phase of my life	(Ap:162, 145)
J7/G7	F	41	45	44	THE SAME – it's just a space in time, it changes nothing in our world	(Ap:164, 147)
J8/G8	F	24	30	25	THE SAME – because the films talks about a past we all know about.	(Ap:165, 148)
J10/G10	F	32	34	47	WORSE – the way the film ends is frustrating, when the protagonist cannot find his friend, who in fact, is probably dead.	(Ap:166)
J12/G12	F	38	51	45	WORSE - I learned something about what people suffer and the difficulties they go through	(Ap:169, 152)
J13/G13	F	22	30	30	THE SAME – I just learned something because this situation is not discussed much today.	(Ap:170)
J14/G14	F	25	35	39	WORSE – I felt a little depressed thinking about what the Jews suffered. I felt anxious seeing so much suffering. The professor had to go through his mother's death, and his friend's knowing that he was to blame for the second.	(Ap:171)
J15/G15	F	33	39	35	BETTER – I felt intellectually stimulated.	(Ap:172, 153)
J17/G18	F	26	35	33	THE SAME – It was interesting, but did not cause a great impact.	(Ap:174)
J19/G19	F	36	39	32	BETTER – It reminded me of important things because unfortunately is still at war	(Ap:175, 154)

J20	F	31	40	43	WORSE – I feel indignant about the way the Jews, were treated, especially the children	(Ap:176)
J21	F	39	39	37	THE SAME – I felt badly about how society can treat some of its members and the film showed this clearly. I felt better because it made me value life more.	(Ap:177)

However, in their longer answer questionnaires, of the sixteen volunteers, seven wrote that they felt worse after watching *Good*. Six volunteers wrote they felt the same and only three that they felt better after watching this movie. Students who wrote they felt the same did so because they feel that watching movies does not have the capacity to change anything. G7/ J7 is an example of this and she gave the same answer for both movies (*cf.* Ap:147, 164). Others wrote they felt the same after watching *Good* because they were previously aware of the issues the film deals, as is the case of J8 (*cf.* Ap:165) and J17(*cf.* Ap:174).

J4(Ap:161), J10 (Ap:167) and J12 (Ap:169) wrote they felt worse after watching *Good* because the film addressed disturbing issues and increased their awareness of some unpleasant characteristics of human nature. Despite the reduced level of on-screen physical violence, J3 wrote that she felt worse after watching the film because it introduced a lot of violence and made her think about the suffering that “men” cause each other (*cf.* Ap:60). J14 (*cf.* Ap:171) wrote she felt a bit depressed after watching the movie because the movie offers no hope, the professor has such a difficult family life and when things start to get better for him, he involves himself in a system that will kill his friend.

The volunteers who felt better after viewing the movie referred to its intellectual stimulation capacity as the causal factor. J5 (*cf.* Ap:162) wrote that she felt better because through watching the movie she learned things she considers important for her development. J15 (*cf.*Ap:171) wrote that she felt better because the film had made her thinking. These outcomes indicate that while watching movies always appears to have an impact on anxiety levels; this impact may not always be relaxing experiences, nor does not this always make viewers feel better. They imply that a certain type of movie must be shown objective to obtain reductions in state anxiety levels.

The male sample size was much smaller, only five in the first trial and four in the second, but I still calculated the average value, in order to be able to compare these

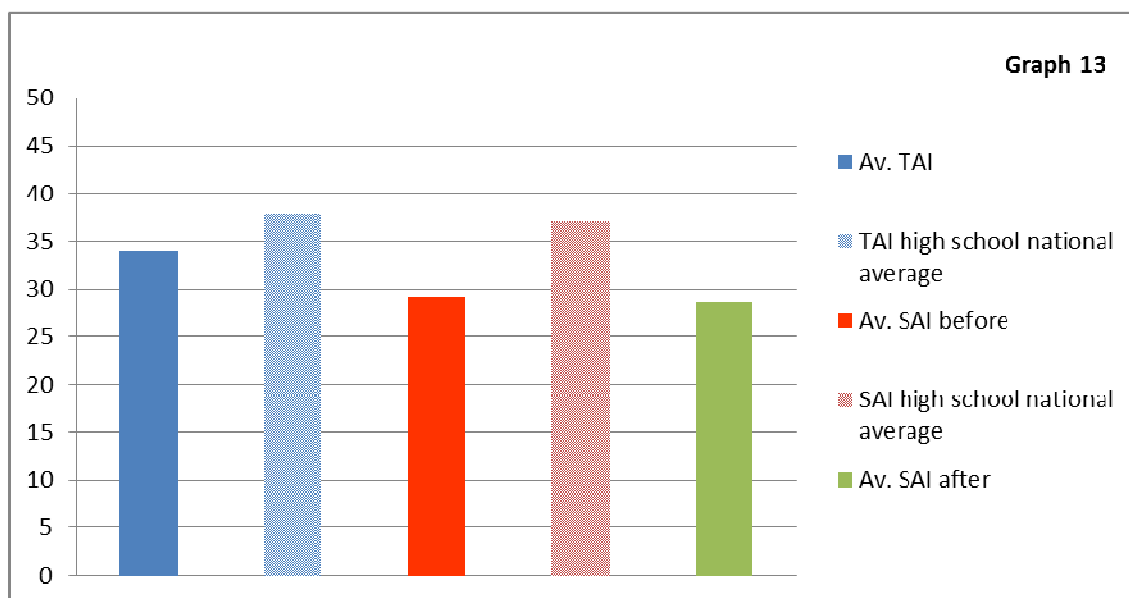
to Silva's national standard values. Again all trials could be included in the calculation because they were all in the low/medium scale.

Table 25 Trial Seven: Average male STAI results recorded on *Elizabethtown* screening

Male STAI results related to the screening of <i>Elizabethtown</i> 26 th March 2010 n=15				
Av. TAI	TAI high school average	SAI high school average	Av. SAI before	Av. SAI after
34	37,8	37	29,2	28,6

The table demonstrates that all the average STAI readings are considerably lower than Silva's standard values. Despite this fact there is still a 4.8 drop from average TAI to average SAI-before and a minor further decrease of 0.6 points during the course of the *Elizabethtown* screening. The male average reduction in this screening is the smallest registered in all the work carried out, but I believe that it is worth noting that it was the first time that both initial SAI and TAI readings were significantly below Silva's averages.

Graph 13 Trial 7: Average male STAI results recorded on *Elizabethtown* screenings



Looking at the individual scores, one sees unusual cases. G6 (28; 22; 30) actually registers an overall increase from TAI to SAI-after, but still writes he feels better after watching *Elizabethtown* (cf. Ap:146). G7 explained that he felt better after watching the movie because it showed that we can overcome sadness and failure (cf. Ap:147), a similar sentiment to that expressed by G9 (39; 34; 33) despite the fact that there is only a minimal reduction from SAI-before to SAI-after (cf. Ap:149). G17 (32; 32; 20) also writes that he feels better after the experience (cf. Ap:156). G11 (34; 32;

33) (cf. Ap:151) and G16 (37; 26; 27) write they feel the same after the screening (cf. Ap:154).

Table 26 Trial Seven: Individual male STAI results recorded on *Elizabethtown* screening

Individual Male Table							
Age	ID	Sex	SAI bef	TAI	SAI after	Long answers – how volunteers feel after watching the movie	Reference
	G6	M	22	28	30	BETTER – because the film has a happy ending and the humour used means that even the sad scenes become funny	(Ap:146)
	G9	M	34	39	33	BETTER – because it shows that when something bad happens, we should try to react positively and not be discouraged.	(Ap:149)
	G11	M	32	34	33	THE SAME – because the film did not speak to things in my life	(Ap:151)
	G16	M	26	37	27	THE SAME – because though everything worked out well in the film, in life things don't often happen like that	(Ap:154)
	G17	M	32	32	20	BETTER – I had a relaxing time, alone, but also with my friends	(Ap:155)
			29.2	34	28.6		

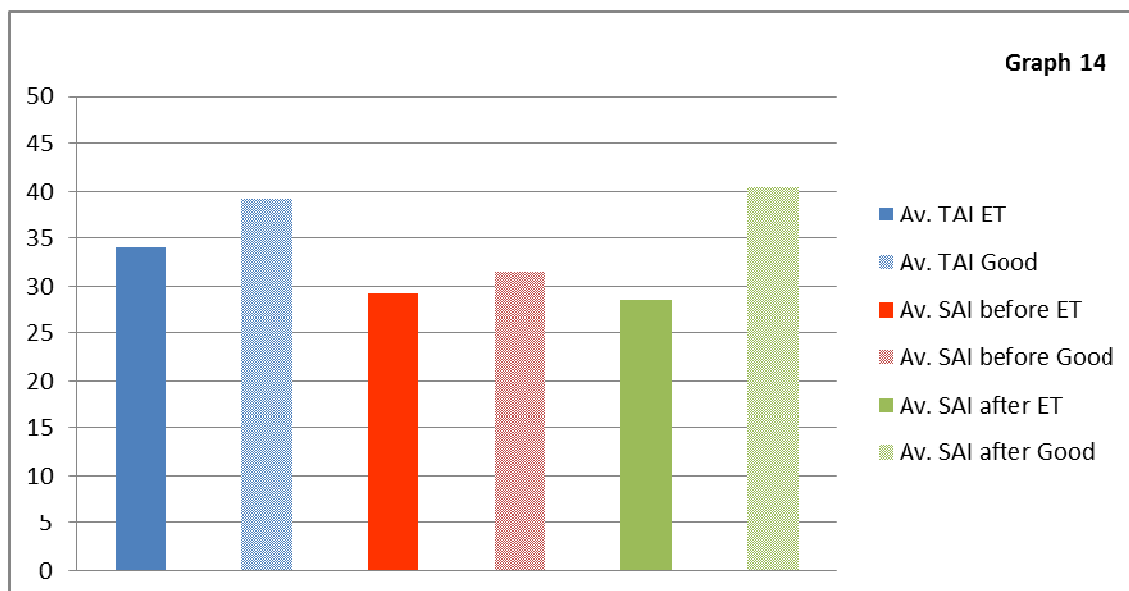
However, while there was a slight reduction during the course of the *Elizabethtown* trial, the table shows that there was a dramatic increase in SAI when volunteers watched *Good*. Different to the female table average SAI-before is actually 2.3 points higher on the *Good* trial, but still 7.8 points down from TAI.

Table 27 Trial Seven: Comparison of average male STAI after *Elizabethtown* and *Good* screenings

Male STAI results comparing screening of <i>Elizabethtown</i> and <i>Good</i> (19 th October 2010 n=4)					
Av. TAI ET	Av. TAI <i>Good</i>	Av. SAI before ET	Av. SAI before <i>Good</i>	Av. SAI after ET	Av. SAI after <i>Good</i>
34	39,3	29,2	31,5	28,6	40,5

However the SAI-after score is 9 points higher than the SAI-before and represents the highest average reading of all the trials. It is actually 11.9 points higher than the SAI-after score registered after viewing *Elizabethtown*.

Graph 14 Trial Seven: Comparison of average male STAI after *Elizabethtown* and *Good* screenings



Two of the boys on the *Good* trial wrote that they felt worse after watching the movie. J6 (48; 40; 60) wrote that he felt more insecure, unstable after watching it (*cf.* Ap:163) and J16 (37; 27; 37) wrote that the movie made him feel worse because it showed him that the world we live in may not be what we think it is (*cf.* Ap:173). The other two volunteers, J11 (31; 34; 37) (*cf.* Ap: 168) and J16 (37; 27; 37) wrote that they felt the same after watching *Good* despite significant increases from SAI-before to SAI-after (*cf.* Ap:173). Table 28 below contains full details of individual results.

Table 28 Trial Seven: Individual male STAI results recorded on *Good* screening

Male Table							
Age	ID	Sex	SAI bef	TAI	SAI after	Long answers – how volunteers feel after the movie	Reference
17	J6	M	40	48	60	WORSE- because I felt more insecure	(Ap:163)
18	J9/G9	M	25	41	28	THE SAME – and I can't explain why	(Ap:166, 149)
18	J11/G11	M	34	31	37	THE SAME – I won't have to go through this	(Ap:168, 151)
17	J16/G16	M	27	37	37	WORSE – it made me think that the world we live, might not be what we think it is	(Ap:177, 154)
			31.5	39.25	40.5		

G11 (34; 33; 32) /J11 (31; 34; 37) wrote he felt the same because the situations portrayed did not reflect his life or anticipations for the future (*cf.* Ap:168). Again we return to the notion that viewers feel the same after watching a movie when feelings and emotions experienced during the viewing are not seen as transportable to the person's real life situation, and this can be independent of changes in STAI. The same occurred with the girls who wrote that they felt the same after both trials such as G7 (47; 29; 30)/ J7 (45; 41; 44) and G8 (29; 30; 34)/ J8 (30; 24; 25).

This double trial showed that not all movies reduce SAI levels and that on contemplating screen dilemmas can increase viewers' state anxiety readings. It also indicated that increases in SAI readings are only reflected in viewers' sentiments if viewers transfer elements of the message to their lives. Again comparing the tables that produce the averages, one sees that while in general TAI readings remain relatively stable, there are cases of variance, such as (J3/G3 – 37/47); (J10/G10 – 34/50); (J19/G19 – 39/46). Significantly and noteworthy, all the alterations in TAI readings registered in this double screening trial are reductions. I remembered the local coordinator's observations that she feared the timing of the *Elizabethtown* screening, coinciding with evaluations of the second period might influence the trial negatively. I do not know if that was the case, but the repeated TAI results do seem to indicate that favorable circumstances can influence TAI readings constructively also. These alterations show that TAI readings can improve significantly over a short period of time. Therefore I resolved to repeat the TAI questionnaire with Anna and future free association candidates at the end of our work together.

3.4 Overall conclusions of double screenings

Standard tables indicate that state and trait anxiety readings are very similar in all these groups average under normal circumstances (cf. Spielberg and Silva 2007: 16-18). However, this did not happen on the group film screening trials. The SAI questionnaire filled in before volunteers watched the movie, demonstrated that average state anxiety levels were generally significantly lower than average trait levels, even at the outset of the trial. This was particularly true for female teens, less so for female adults. The reduction from TAI to SAI-before implies that volunteers relaxed at the prospect of watching a movie. This was an unexpected result.

In the single-screening trials average state anxiety levels continued to decrease independent of whether volunteers watched *Elizabethtown* or *Chocolate*. Across the four groups tested in the single-screening trials, there was an overall and very significant reduction from trait anxiety levels to state after viewing, so that the SAI-after reading was much lower than standard values (cf. Silva & Spielberg 2007: 16 -18). Perhaps unsurprisingly, though average reductions from TAI to SAI-before were minimal, the female adult group revealed the greatest decrease from SAI-before to SAI-after. Moreover, though produced by different patterns in each age and sex category, SAI-after was the lowest and most stable reading across all the groups. The highest SAI-after average score (33.1) was registered by the male adult group on the initial single trials and the lowest (26.8) was recorded by the female teen group on trial five (curiously, the group that had the highest original average TAI score). However, most SAI-after scores scored between 29.4 and 31.5, a result that shows a variance of only 2.1, despite the fact that the publics who watched the movies were below to differ age and sex groups.

Perhaps, not unexpectedly, the second screenings on trials five and six showed a slightly stronger reduction in state anxiety in the second trial, when volunteers watched more than one movie of this type. The adult female SAI-after average score was 30.5 after the *Elizabethtown* screening on trial six and 27.3 after watching *Chocolate*. I wondered if this implied the construction of some form of positive feed-forward cycle. In trial seven, SAI-before the second screening was lower than TAI and SAI-before on the prior screening of *Elizabethtown*. This group had reacted positively to the Crowe's

film and perhaps volunteers were expecting a similar experience. However, when they watched Vincent Amorin's *Good*, an emotionally challenging movie, a marked increase in SAI was registered during the viewing. At the end of the trial average SAI-after stood at 36.3 and 40.5 for female and male teens respectively. These increases were not as severe as those observed by Spielberg when volunteers had been exposed to graphic work accidents onscreen. In Spielberg's trials SAI mean readings for males were 50.03 and 60.94 for females (*cf.* Spielberg 1983: 40-45). Still, the increases on the *Good* trial were significant and we can say that volunteers' state anxiety levels are adversely affected by exposure to physical or emotional violence.

As already mentioned, looking at all the trials together made me wonder if the reduction in state anxiety levels could be considered as a positive feed-forward response. Generally state anxiety levels decreased significantly when volunteers sat down to watch a movie; this reduction was particularly strong in teen groups. In general volunteers in this group also indicated they watched a lot of movies, which encouraged thinking along the lines of a positive feed-forward response. The idea was further supported by the fact that lower SAI-after values were recorded after the second screening on double trials five and six and the lower SAI before score on trial seven. However, the *Good* screening indicated that for the SAI reductions to continue viewers needed to watch a film with a positive and uplifting narrative. Nevertheless, the similarity in the SAI results registered after volunteers watched *Elizabethtown*, *Chocolate* and *Say Anything* indicated that the actual story may not so important.

While, this may be the case for reductions in state anxiety levels, volunteers' longer answers indicate a different type of interaction with each movie. In the single trial, all the volunteers who watched *Chocolate* wrote they felt the same afterwards, despite significant average reductions in SAI. In trial six volunteers watched *Elizabethtown* first and *Chocolate* later. Average female SAI-after watching *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate* stood at 30.5 and 27.3 respectively. The average male figures were 30.0 and 29.4 respectively. Therefore average SAI readings were slightly lower after watching *Chocolate* than *Elizabethtown* and volunteers indicated verbally that they had enjoyed the former more. Also, a similar number of volunteers wrote they felt better after watching both movies. However, volunteers indicated that they felt better after watching *Chocolate* because it allowed them relaxation. A few also gave this reason for feeling better after watching *Elizabethtown*, but most wrote they felt better because *Elizabethtown* encouraged them and gave them new ideas that they wanted to

transfer to their real lives. Borrowing from Holland's terminology, something in the movie seemed to "meet" some viewers, and they felt better when they accepted the movie's "challenge" and aspired to carry its message to them into their total living experience. While *Chocolate* offered relaxation, *Elizabethtown* seemed to offer other possibilities. However, volunteers only felt better after watching it if they felt they could carry its message into their own lives. If they thought watching it was just a fun experience, they relaxed enjoyed reductions in anxiety levels, but their state of mind did not change. A similar situation at been observed at the end of trial five.

Another point that had surprised me on the STAI trials was that reductions in anxiety readings were not necessarily equated to volunteers reporting that they felt better after watching a movie. In fact, some volunteers who experienced large reductions from TAI to SAI-after during the course of the screening wrote that they felt the same at the end of the trial. Others, like B4 who experienced a minimal 2-point reduction in STAI wrote they felt better, "renewed" after watching *Elizabethtown*. A similar situation occurred on double trial seven. However, volunteers' longer answers showed that they felt better (after watching *Elizabethtown*), or worse (after watching *Good*), if they carried the experience into their real lives. Volunteers who experienced decreases and increases in SAI readings, but who regarded the experience as confined to the viewing period, wrote that they felt the same after watching each movie. Most of the volunteers who felt the same after watching *Good* explained that watching the movie did not affect their state of spirit because it was only a film, or because they already knew about the situations the film portrayed. Some volunteers even experienced increase in SAI levels but wrote they felt better because the film had exposed them to something necessary if not positive, it offered an intimate learning experience. Therefore, it appears that for viewers to feel better (or worse) after watching a movie, they have to feel that they can transfer ideas they have seen to their real life.

Thus as Holland proposed there do indeed seem to be different levels of connection between films and publics. The practical trials imply that the first level of contact may actually precede the activity because merely sitting down to watch a movie resulted in generalized reductions in anxiety level. Based on Damasio's somatic marker hypothesis, I wondered if it could be proposed that cultural education has taught, young people especially, that watching a movie will be a pleasant activity where biological homeostasis will be achieved. Therefore, bodies rest on anticipation of watching a movie.

The second level of interactions appears to occur as a consequence of merely watching the movie. This may have been the reaction registered by the STAI questionnaires and it seems to be recorded at an unconscious level, because volunteers were not always aware of this at a conscious level. However, when a film offers positive ideas and comforting models, watching it does appear to result in reductions in anxiety levels. However, this contact form of contact with films may not always result in relaxation (reduction in anxiety) because if a film presenting emotionally challenging ideas with images of physical violence or poignant conflict is viewed, viewers' anxiety levels increase automatically.

Holland then proposed that for viewers to really enjoy a book (or a film) they had to make sense of it within the contexts of their own lives. However, for it to truly expand their living experience they had to "hover" over it so that they could absorb underlining principles into their own lives. Intriguingly, volunteers' longer answer questionnaires offered examples of both types of interaction. Some wrote how watching *Elizabethtown* reminded them of trips, journeys or even problems, others indicated that watching *Chocolate*, *Good* or even *Say Anything* made them think about situations lived at other times. These connections seemed to give more insight into the film and viewers' own experience of it but, they rarely resulted in alterations in emotional states. Perhaps, one of the most surprising outcomes was that the only movie that appeared to improve viewers' emotional states, for reasons other than fun and relaxation, was Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown*. Over and over again, volunteers wrote they felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* because it transmitted new ideas, perspective and the capacity to develop coping skills I wondered why this was so?

Chapter Four

More directed work with individual volunteers

Reviewing the progress of the practical work undertaken during the course of this study, I could see that in each chapter as the work progressed, my role also altered. In chapter two, after learning to use the free associative film analysis method myself, I instructed and facilitated its application. In chapter three, I observed, reported and analyzed the results obtained from the STAI and open-answer self-reporting questionnaires. However, in chapter four, I played a more active role, and based on the observation of previous results, I set out to use different forms of contact with film to fulfill specific objectives. This is the unifying factor in all the work presented Chapter Four. I used volunteer's interactions with film to address issues relevant to particular individuals. All the volunteers in the blended film analysis trials completed STAI and open-answer self-reporting questionnaires on their contact with movies and practiced (or attempted to practice) different forms of free associative film criticism. The practical work also included debate on topics such as identity, anxiety, stress management and neurobiological theory.

Chapter Four is divided into two sections. It begins with the individual work carried out with volunteers on trial five starting with a review of the feedback sessions in February 2010 and extending to include follow-up questionnaires completed in June 2010 and interviews in October 2011. I started to develop specific methods of working with films to try to address issues relevant to volunteers and this work laid the foundation for the later directed work with two volunteers 17 year-old Anita and 45 year-old Alana. The second section is dedicated to reviewing the work carried out with Anita and Alana.

As already mentioned, trial five began as a simple double group screening trial where volunteers would watch two films that transmitted positive and uplifting messages. However, because of the very positive results obtained by the initial screening, I was invited to work for a three month period with this group. I developed more directed activities during this time, with the aim of assisting these volunteers sustain reductions in state anxiety levels obtained while watching the movies used in the initial public screening. I adapted the debate & discussion, film screening and instruction in free associative analysis methods to try to assist Anita and Alana overcome specific problems. Anita had a very high trait anxiety level at the beginning of the film trials and was despondent about her future. Over a four-week period,

blending STAI questionnaires, free associative film criticism and a theoretical discussion of anxiety helped her develop coping skills to deal with her problems. Alana's story is very different, but no less interesting. Alana was interested in participating in the project because every time she watches sad movies she became emotionally distressed, cried copiously and one hand hurt her. Even though she understood that she was watching a movie; the ache was still very real and could become excruciating if she connected significantly with a film. She had never understood this physical reaction to sad movies and asked to participate to see if she could understand this.

4.1 Individual work with volunteers on trial five

As already indicated the purpose of the initial screening on trial five had been to determine if volunteers' anxiety levels were influenced by watching specific movies. STAI and long answer questionnaires indicated that all the volunteers on this screening reacted very positively to watching *Elizabethtown*. In the individual feedback sessions in February 2010, I presented students with their individual STAI results and discussed these with them. I had been instructed by Professor Silva to focus the discussion on their STAI results and especially to highlight the good SAI results, but not to discuss issues related to psychology, as this was not my field. I agreed completely with this opinion, as I wanted the students to see me as a literature teacher, who could talk to them about films and instruct them in film analysis techniques. If other subjects were discussed it was always within a literary context, or to explain why contact with films and literature could be important.

Perhaps, because this was the stance I assumed, the atmosphere was very good in this short interviews because even though volunteers' TAI results were generally higher than average tables, their SAI results demonstrated that they reacted very positively to the movie going experience in general and to watching and thinking about *Elizabethtown* in particular. I answer student's individual queries and as they were in the science and technology area they were very interested in discussing the scientific issues covered by the project. Some wanted to know more about the differences between fear and anxiety and we returned to Heidegger's separation of these concepts and Critchley's exemplification.

Generally students with high TAI scores said that the private discussion helped them to see the advantage of reading books or watching movies. Perceiving that anxiety is something that builds up from inside helped volunteers to understand that they would need to develop strategies to break the buildup of anxiety cycles. We discussed the way watching movies or thinking about scenes or ideas in films that brought them happy memories might help this. It was easy to talk about this idea because SAI-before and SAI-after results indicated most had reacted very well to the idea of watching the movie, and to the film itself. This also showed that they had already reduced state anxiety levels quite effortlessly, even though some admitted that they "naturally" get

very anxious about uncertainty very quickly. Therefore, they understood the need to develop strategies that break their “natural” anxiety cycles. Many students participated in the feedback sessions, but for economy of time I will just refer to the interviews with A3, A7 and A9 as these volunteers also did other individual work that is relevant to this subject.

On 4th March 2010, a 90-minute class was dedicated to the discussion of alternative paradigms offered by cinema and literature. Most of the students from the *Elizabethtown* screening and a few others were present for this discussion. We started off by talking about the films students enjoyed and presenting *Elizabethtown* for those who had not seen the movie. We then talked about the way watching *Elizabethtown* had reduced their anxiety levels and how they as a group seemed to respond very positively to the movie-going experience. I introduced basic concepts of Sapolsky’s and Damasio’s work that demonstrate the connections between the abstract and the concrete, the physical and emotional. We also talked about Heidegger’s proposals on anxiety and its positive characteristics along the lines presented in the previous chapter. We spoke about Heidegger’s proposal of a “resolute Dasein” or knowledge and acceptance of one’s unique way of being in the world. We discussed Lichtenstein’s proposal of unique identity theme and I introduced Holland’s use of free associative film/literary criticism to use the narrative of the other (films or books with which we connect) to help increase awareness of identity theme, or way of being in the world. We argued as to whether this could enhance the capacity to build an appropriate narrative of self. We reviewed Holland’s free associative film analysis within this context.

I also explained Erickson’s concept of ego identity and emphasized the critical points of Erickson’s adolescent psychosocial stage, so that they could identify many of the dilemmas they felt as normal to their stage of development (*cf.* Erikson 1980). I contrasted Erikson’s ego identity to Lichtenstein’s concept of identity theme demonstrating that though these theories both referred to different concepts of identity, they were compatible. The former deals with the person’s internal development as they pass through growth phases common to all humans; the latter presents an individual construct that demonstrates an individual way of dealing with the world that the person acquires through biology and early education.

Their questions also demonstrated some of the issues that led to their disquiet. While some had constructive plans for the future at a professional level, others felt

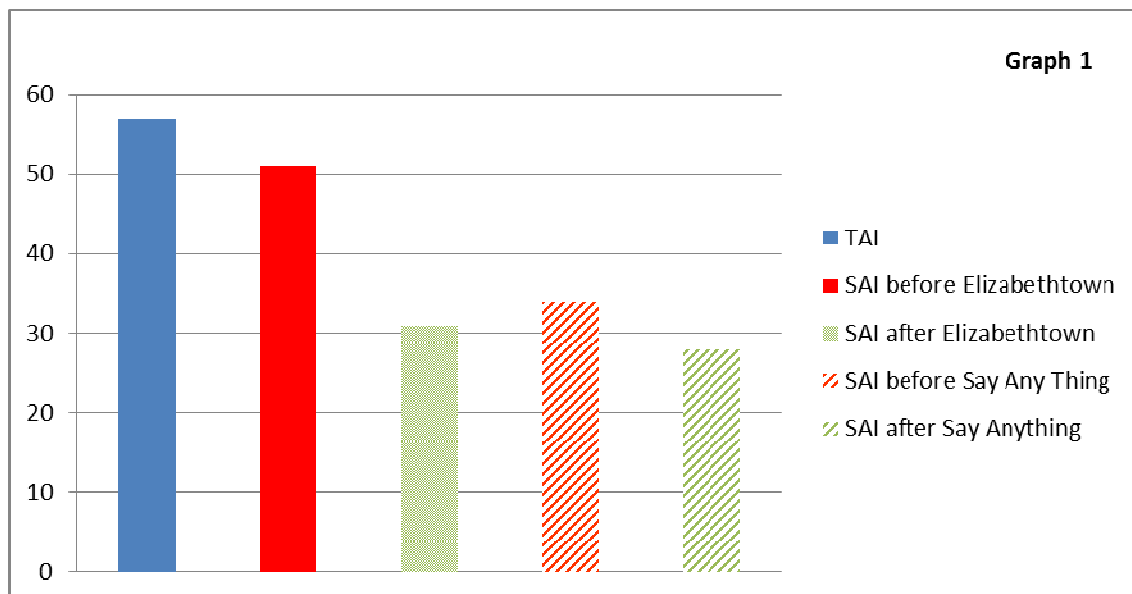
intimidated and powerless due to the uncertainty of the contemporary social and economic setting. It was difficult for them to see what their future would hold and this led to despondency and anxiety. I spoke to them about McLeod's theories on collective narrative deconstruction from traditional to modern and post-modern society. The purpose was to illustrate that the disenchantment they felt had more to do with the defragmentation of the collective narrative and as such was not their fault. We discussed the possibilities of developing a socially conscious individual narrative based on awareness of self. I suggested that awareness of unique identity theme through free associative film analysis might prove a useful tool in this respect. We also discussed the relevance of thinking about books and films that they felt they connected with, that offered relaxation first, thus reducing anxiety levels, and possibly offering alternative life paradigms.

Some students were interested in knowing more about free associative film analysis, and their teacher was willing to accept this as an analysis tool for a class assignment: the Reading Contract, which required them to do a film review. I set a calendar for viewing the movies with students to establish connection points, and instruct them on free associative film criticism. In all, four students requested to have assistance doing free associative film analysis to the films they had selected for their. A3 selected Hayao Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle*, (2004) we watched this together on 12th March 2010. A5 selected Fernando Meirelles' *Blindness* (2008), screened on 18th March. A8 chose David Koepp's *Secret Window* (2004) screened on 19th March. A4 selected Mark Herman's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2008) screened on 25th March. The two most relevant sessions were the first and the last. The first was a true free associative choice, the last was a rational one, but as I worked with A4 she talked about other free associative choices and we discussed how she could work with these. A5 and A8 had picked their films before our work began, because they liked them. The students' connections with these works were rational, not emotive, thus though I taught them how free associative film analysis works we did not really identify connection points. Therefore, these trials will not be referred to in detail.

4.1.1 An analysis of the work with A7

Though A3's progress is the most striking I will begin this section with A7's answers because the initial reason for this double trial had been to see if volunteers would react differently to two similar films, in this case Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown* and *Say Anything*. A7 was the volunteer who reacted most differently to the two films and was the only one who wrote that she felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* but the same after *Say Anything*. A7's STAI results support her statements about her feelings after each trial. She registered a 20-point drop in SAI during *Elizabethtown* (51: 31), and a mere 6-point drop while watching *Say Anything* (34: 28).

Graph 1 –A7's STAI results after watching *Elizabethtown* and *Say Anything*



It should be noted that her SAI-before prior to watching *Say Anything* was only 34, while it stood at 51 before watching *Elizabethtown*. Her TAI score at the time of the *Elizabethtown* screening stood at 57 (at the high end of the medium level), so the SAI of 34 before watching *Say Anything* was already 23 points below her previously registered state level. These results seem to indicate that a sustained reduction in STAI was attained during the course of the whole procedure, which was probably a more relevant outcome than the fact that A7's SAI level dropped a further 6 points while she watched *Say Anything*. However, as the final value registered after watching *Say Anything* is below that registered at the end of *Elizabethtown*, it can be said that watching this type of movie seems to have a very powerful influence on A7.

Therefore it is appropriate to see if more insight into this occurrence can be gained from her long answers. She did indeed write significant things about what watching *Elizabethtown* meant to her. She wrote it helped her rethink attitudes about life and that watching *Elizabethtown* made her realize that a lot of life is wasted by letting oneself get trapped with details and the film and thinking about it helped her decide that she did not want this. She wanted to live more openly and happily:

So many things occurred to me, I really liked this film and it made me think that sometimes we make too much of little things and this stops us from being alive, from living every moment, from living happily. (Ap:189)

She wrote that she felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* because it let her see attitudes she often assumed when absorbed by problems, but had been hidden previously to her. Also it seemed to allow her to think that, though life may have problems, it could be enjoyed “thorns and all”, if one was willing to accept the journey life had to offer:

[...] it portrays ordinary situations and shows the kind of standard reaction that anyone could have to these. It shows us a part of ourselves that we do not understand when we are having this attitude because we are absorbed by the problem. Also, while we are thinking about our problems, we can waste a lot of our lives. [...] Things happen because they have to happen, but we have to extract the most out of being alive, because life is like that and “If it wasn’t this, it would be something else”¹. (idem)

Drew’s road trip was her favorite part of the movie because this is where he finally begins to really live, and to know what this means. Claire was A7’s favorite character because she knew how to be happy, despite the fact that she wasn’t wealthy or didn’t have a fantastic life style. These comments indicate not only that A7 connected personally and powerfully with *Elizabethtown*, but also that it offered her significant visual metaphors. I wondered if her personalization of *Elizabethtown*’s ideas had been at least partially responsible for her low SAI readings before watching *Say Anything*.

Normally A7 watched five or six movies a month and watching a movie represents two distinct things for her. Movie can be “an escape and relaxation”, but also offer “reflection, entering a new world, where the viewer can connect with other people, other situations and other realities.” Perhaps watching *Say Anything* corresponded with the first part of the statement and *Elizabethtown* with the second (cf. Ap:186-187). A7

¹ I found it curious that A7 was able to quote Holly quoting Mitch in the film.

wrote that she felt the same after watching *Say Anything* because she saw it as a simple love story it did not transmit strong ideas to her though she enjoyed it. Unlike *Elizabethtown*, it did not remind her of anything that had happened in her life; rather it made her think about a different, less technologically developed society where children still trusted parents. Her reaction to Lloyd's character and her admiration of his open-heartedness remind me of her reactions to *Elizabethtown*:

The thoughts that came to my mind were related to being able to be like Lloyd. To not be afraid of revealing what I feel, who I am, because we should not be afraid of this.
(Ap:190)

In her feedback interview A7 had told me that she had anticipated her higher TAI reading, but she also was also pleased at her SAI reaction to *Elizabethtown* because she felt that watching it had affected her outlook, so she was pleased but not particularly surprised at the significant reduction from TAI to SAI-after. She said watching *Elizabethtown* showed her that simply worrying about things does not help, and that it is important to focus on the more significant things in life. She told me that she continued to think about the film, as it had shown her that we often waste a lot of our times thinking about inconsequential details and that we forget to live the moment in time that is actually occurring.

She also told me that she had selected Joe Wright's *The Soloist* (2009) for her Reading Contract assignment and that she would like to do the free association project. However, she did not actually sign up for a session when I circulated the screening schedule. At the *Say Anything* screening, she told me she had chosen to do a traditional analysis of *The Soloist* because, when she spoke to me, she had only seen the trailer and she had connected with this. However, when she watched the film, she did not really connect with it the way she had thought she would or the way she had connected with *Elizabethtown*. She had thought of switching her project on *Elizabethtown*, because watching it had been such a unique experience for her. Unfortunately, this was not possible in terms of her Portuguese language assignment, as *Elizabethtown* was not based on a book and this was a requirement. However, she told me that she still thought a lot about *Elizabethtown* the ideas she connected with in this film.

I wondered if A7's thinking about *Elizabethtown* could be seen as the "hovering" that Holland described in *Literature and the Brain* as the kind of contact

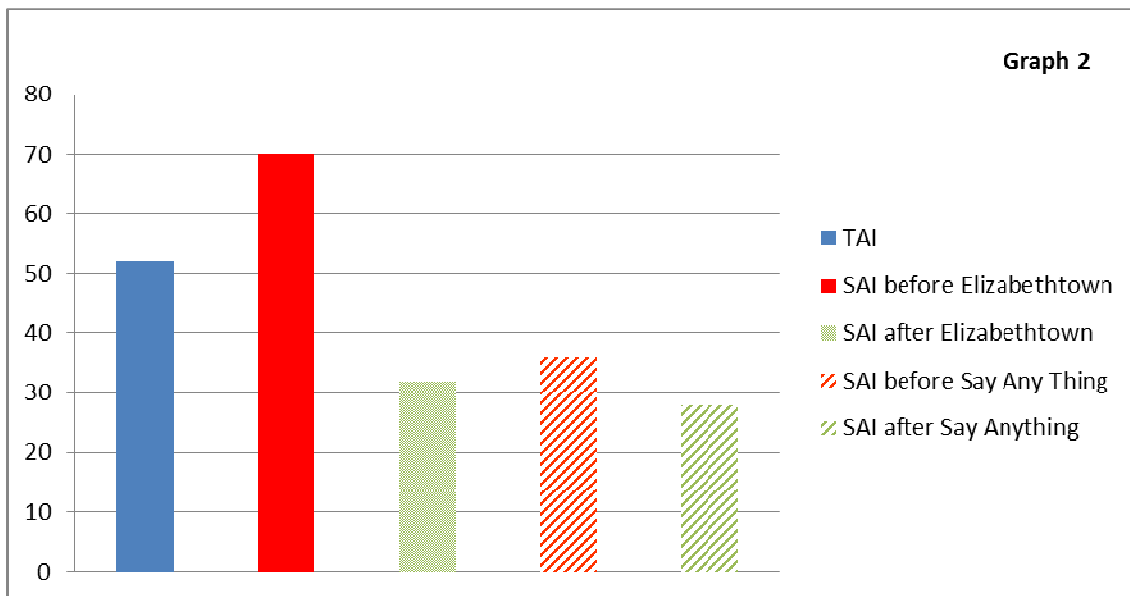
with literature² that allows it to play its full role. In his model this implies readers going beyond the first stage pleasure/relaxation, the second enjoyment where readers understand the ideas portrayed in the fictional narrative within the context of their own lives and into the third stage, where they absorb ideas and concepts behind the physical that can have a transitional and transformation impact on readers or viewers lives. I wondered if her sustained low SAI readings could not be a reflection of this. Whatever, the situation, it can be seen that connecting with this film had been very significant for A7 and seemed to bring concrete results to her life.

4.1.2 An analysis of the work with A3

A3 (70; 52; 32), was the volunteer who registered the most noticeable reduction in SAI scores after watching *Elizabethtown*. Like A7, her SAI values before the *Say Anything* screening were much lower than before *Elizabethtown*. In fact they were close to her SAI-after on the initial trial, yet she still registered an 8-point reduction in SAI readings after watching *Say Anything* (-;36; 28). A3 wrote that she felt better after watching both movies, and it is interesting to see how she explains her answers. Not surprisingly, A3 wrote that she connected intimately with *Elizabethtown*. The film made her think that the difficult family situation she was experiencing at the time (her parents' divorce) could get better. It cheered her up; she reasoned that if Drew could get over the terrible situations he was in, maybe she could too. *Elizabethtown* principally showed her that we can rise again after a tragedy, if we want to and if we look for help. The film portrayed this as possible even when we do not think it is; she had needed to learn this.

² In this context, I am using the term literature in the broad sense of the word that Holland uses in *Literature and the Brain*, where he refers to all forms of fictional narratives as literary whether these be to books, plays, films or even TV soap operas .

Graph 2: A3's STAI results after watching *Elizabethtown* and *Say Anything*



The movie made her feel better because despite, all the terrible things that happened to Drew, he survived a very dark period in his life with Claire's help and with perseverance. Drew discovered feelings and experienced events that he might never have encountered, if not for this dark phase. The film led A3 to think that sometimes we have to go through difficult periods to understand ourselves better. Drew's road trip was her favorite part, and he was her favorite character because she identified with him and his situation. She admired his courage and determination to overcome his problems (*cf.* Ap:180).

I was not sure initially how to approach A3 at the feedback interview, as her SAI-before reading had been so high (even though it was reassuring that her SAI-after was so much better). Initially, the local coordinator and I had wondered if the school psychologist should be present at the interview, but having obtained her professional opinion, we opted against this idea for two reasons. First, this might sway the orientation of the project in her mind from a literary study to psychology. Second, it would mean introducing another person to the interview and draw attention to A3's situation. Also, the school psychologist was alert to A3's situation and attentive to it. Therefore, I used the same approach with A3 as with all the other volunteers. This worked very well because A3 entered the room telling me that she was very happy she had watched *Elizabethtown* and wanting to discuss the movie and her connections with it. She said watching *Elizabethtown* had helped her at the time, and was continuing to help her, because it had allowed her to gain perspective on her situation and move away

from blame. Watching it had showed her that we are often not responsible for the bad things that happen to us, and that true friends want to help us when we have problems. Also, the way Drew overcame his problems gave her a powerful positive image of being able to overcome disasters.

She told me that her parents' divorce had affected her very badly, but she had been ashamed to talk about it to her friends. Connecting with *Elizabethtown* showed her that she did not need to be afraid to tell her friends and ask for help. She had done so, and her friends had been fantastic. Things were still not easy, and she realized that she had a long way to go. But life was a lot better, and when she felt the pressure build she would think of Drew on the road trip; if he was able to overcome his fiascos, so could she. The image of him driving along in the car brought light, despite the fact that he had been dealing with heavy subjects. She was quietly confident that things would get better in the future; after all she still had both parents and her brother and sister. They just were no longer living together, but that was not going to change and it wasn't her fault.

Elizabethtown's influence lasted long after she had watched it, and she wanted to continue the work with films. She participated actively in the class discussion and was one of the first students who volunteered to do the free associative film criticism. When I explained how to select films free associatively, she knew she wanted to use Hayao Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), because she connected with the main character, Sophie. We watched *Howl's Moving Castle* together on 12th March 2010 to help A3 identify her connection points and to give me the opportunity to instruct her individually on free associative film analysis. *Howl's Moving Castle* is an animated movie. Despite this fact, A3 loved it because it is full of magic, love and friendship. A short review of the movie is helpful to better understand her reading of this film.

Howl's Moving Castle opens with the main character Sophie making beautiful hats for her stepmother. There is a lot of excitement in the town because the famous magician Howl and his moving castle are in the area. Like the other girls in the shop Sophie wants to leave work to see him. Even though she is pretty, honorable and kind-hearted, she is shy and does not have the self-confidence to stand up for herself as her more confident older sister Lettie recommends. Therefore, she stays on working in the shop when everyone else leaves. When Sophie finally leaves her work, she is accosted by two soldiers who taunt her. Out of nowhere Howl comes to Sophie's rescue and literally flies away with her. He is handsome, a genius with a reputation for being

haughty and proud, but he is gentle and kind to Sophie. The Wicked Witch of the West sees his kindness to Sophie and does not approve of it, so she casts a spell on Sophie. As a result Sophie becomes an old woman overnight. Ashamed of her appearance she runs away. By chance, she is able to take refuge in Howl's moving castle. Without knowing who she is the magician accepts Sophie as his housekeeper and she and Markl, Howl's young assistant, take care of the moving castle. When the magician is away Markl disguises himself to look old enough to sell the magic potions that provide their income.

What no one knows is that years before, for political gain, the other powerful witch in the region, Madam Suliman, had stolen the heart of the young prince of the North and turned him into the literally heartless magician Howl. Despite his impaired condition, Howl feels loyalty to his people and tries to defend the Kingdom of the North when it is attacked by the evil Suliman. Weakened by his struggles Howl hides in his castle. Sophie has fallen in love with the courageous Howl and he too had grown fond of the cackling old woman who has become his confidant. Later, with the assistance of Calcifer, a magical creature residing in Howl's castle, the spell on Sophie is broken. When Howl gravely wounded from his struggles with the evil Suliman sees Sophie as she really is, he immediately falls in love with her and they kiss. When his true love kisses him back, his heart is returned and he again becomes the Prince of the North and the war between the kingdoms ends. Therefore, it is a story of love and courage and the triumph of good over evil.

A3 first watched *Howl's Moving Castle* a number of years before because her elder brother told her that the heroine, Sophie, reminded him of her. When she saw the movie, she identified completely with Sophie. A3 said that she feels Sophie is like her because she works hard and is honorable; but she is shy, lacks confidence in her abilities and sometimes lets other people take advantage of her. However, she also wants to have adventure and magic in her life. The fact that Sophie achieves these was comforting for A3. It allowed her to think that one day she could achieve these things too, in her own world and way. As we watched the movie, I felt that if A3 "saw" Sophie in her true light, recognized her value, it would help her to accept herself (as had happened with Anna and Baby in the initial free associative trials).

A3 loved the image the movie drew of victory and the capacity to continue a struggle in the face of terrible adversity. I commented that this was a very powerful

metaphor, and asked if she truly identified with Sophie's character and strength. She replied that she did; she had not yet achieved the end result, but her goal was to fight to the end and remain true to ideals of honesty, character and friendship. I then asked A3 if Sophie's triumph encouraged her; she answered that it did now. It had previously been difficult to believe that watching Sophie triumph could be anything more than a piped-dream, but she said our work had taught her that images can be powerful and can help people change course. After all, this was what had happened when she used appropriate images from *Elizabethtown*.

When selecting connection points, I felt A3 react to the scene where Sophie is accosted by the soldiers. A3 agreed, she said that she could feel Sophie's fear. Then she rejoices as Sophie is rescued by none other than Howl himself. Even though Sophie has not been given the opportunity to leave work to see him, she meets him personally and her hard work is rewarded. She laughed at and identified with the scenes where Howl's young assistant puts on a disguise to make him look older and wiser in order to sell his potions. And she identified with the final scene where love, honor and hard work prevail: Sophie is returned to her youthful form, Howl regains his heart (only to give it to Sophie), and they prepare to live a happy and magical life together.

A3 told me that she had watched this movie many times before. Having learned a little about free associative film criticism after watching *Elizabethtown*, she commented that her connection with *Howl's Moving Castle* showed her that we can only love someone else after first loving and appreciating ourselves. She then referred to a very strong association point that I had not picked up on. She said that when Sophie was transformed into the old woman, her appearance made it difficult for her to see herself as she truly was on the inside. But she had to look beyond the exterior to help Howl. This gave her a strong visual image that showed her we must appreciate ourselves to be able to give something to others, despite how we may think we appear to others. She told me that each time she watched the movie she constructed Sophie's image more; she felt that this helped her construct her own image and build expectation for the future.

Watching the movie, she always sees that Sophie never gives up, even though it often looks as though all is lost. She also observes Sophie learning to know, understand and value herself. Sophie initially does this in order to help Howl, but she continues because she knows it is the right thing to do. She said that watching Sophie's progress

helps her to try to do the same. She perceives that she must understand and appreciate herself not only for her own well-being, but because it will enable her to help others. Sophie is her guide. I realized that A3 had really connected with this film and the free association instruction worked well and easily.

This conversation with A3 was the last time I spoke to her before she watched *Say Anything* in the second group screening. A3 really offered the opportunity to observe varied and curious interactions with films. In the *Elizabethtown* screening, she connected intimately with a film she had never seen before, still she wrote significantly about it because that connection was there and she was able to articulate its influence on her. In the *Howl's Moving Castle* I was able to observe not only a strong connection, but one that had matured over time. Her reaction to *Say Anything*, was totally different, while she enjoyed this movie, she did not connect personally with it. When reading A3's responses to *Say Anything*, I sensed a more general connection to this film – not the close connection that was evident in her responses to *Elizabethtown*. She wrote that she felt better after watching the movie because happy endings comfort her and make her hopeful that she might share a similar fate (maybe a reflection of her feelings about *Howl's Moving Castle*). She appreciated characters in the movie: for instance, Diane reminded her of herself, because like Diane she is very concerned about her studies and thinks a lot about her professional future. She was happy that, during the film, Diane understood that friends are important; reinforcing a conclusion she had come to after connecting with *Elizabethtown*. A3 wrote: “Of course parents are important, sometimes they are our best friends, but it is always good to have friends outside the family circle. I think I chose well in this regard because I have many friends and they are really wonderful.” (Ap:181)

A3's SAI-before *Say Anything* (36) provided concrete evidence that her state anxiety levels were stable and encouraging, especially considering the fact that it had stood at 70 just three months before. Her SAI decreased further (to 28) after watching the movie. While watching the movie, A3 wrote that she concentrated quite a lot on the characters' stories; and the film increased her belief that life is only good when shared: “It's hard to have balance alone as the film shows, [in the movie] while one is concerned about the professional side; the other thinks about the emotional side. Together they achieve balance.” (Ap:181) Her favorite part of the movie was when Diane asked Lloyd to give her a second chance and he did. Lloyd was her favorite

character because he had a passion for life that she would love to have. Though he is honorable and responsible (as she feels she is), he can be spontaneous and live in the moment, not worrying about the future or regretting the past. She loves his concern for Diane and his openheartedness. A3 would love to have this spontaneity, but recognizes that her insecurity interferes with this, and that she has difficulty living in the now without thinking about consequences. I was struck with the way contact with a movie allowed A3 to write about such personal issues articulately and non-judgmentally.

Movies are very important for A3; she watches 10-15 per month during the school year and more during the holidays. They are her favorite holiday pastime. She described this experience as entering a different reality, where she tries to forget the real world and her problems as much as possible. She follows the story to such an extent that she feels as if she is a character in the film. Observing her reactions during the screenings, I think that watching relevant movies is actually a very important exercise for A3. It is not just a hobby, especially when associated with reflective thought, it appears to allow her to deal with real life situations appropriately (*cf.* Ap:181).

My official involvement with this group ended with the *Say Anything* trial, but I was curious to know whether the effects extended beyond the trial period from December 2009 to March 2010. Also, I had learned from my own experience, and from Anna and Aida's free associative trials, that reminders of the new way of thinking were not only beneficial, but necessary to maintain change. Therefore, I send a "Feedback Questionnaire" to the class through the local coordinator. It had only three questions and two volunteers answered – A3 and A4. The questions were: 1. What does watching a movie mean to you? 2. Did the "Reading Contract" project have any impact on your life? 3. Did being involved with Cecilia Martins' research project have any impact on your life?

A3 answered:

QUESTION 1: Watching a film is like entering another reality, I forget my world and I let myself become completely absorbed in the story that is playing out in front of me. It is like turning off my brain and turning on my senses, I just feel all the emotions related to the film surface in my body.

Sometimes, I watch a movie to synchronize with someone else, but sometimes it lets me feel in harmony only with myself. I think I am very fortunate to have this safety valve and the best of it all is that there are thousands of films to help me.

QUESTION 2: Yes, it did. It showed me that when we are working or showing something to others, if it is something we really love, it becomes easier. Sometimes I even forgot my fears and I did not feel that I was making a presentation in front of a crowd. [she is talking about the oral presentation of her work in class – I did not attend this class as it was part of her formal evaluation for the subject, but her teacher told me it was quite a personal free associative film analysis.]

It was wonderful that our teacher allowed us to choose the book/film we wanted to analyze. This made the assignment special and interesting. It was a very successful project and I really enjoyed doing it.

QUESTION 3: Yes, it did and I think, especially during the first part, it represented not only a new adventure, but a moment of happiness when I really needed it. ... [Cecilia] helped me understand some points I had in common with some characters in the films we watched and this taught me some things for my life. Without any doubt, it was a fantastic experience that I am very grateful for. (Ap:182)

I was heartened by these outcomes and hopeful that she would continue the work we had begun. One feature stood out in A3's comments: she felt very clearly that emotions and thinking patterns could be transferred from fictional worlds to real life. As the original single group screened showed and the double screenings confirmed, this principle is fundamental to viewers' feeling better or more hopeful after watching a movie with which they connect. As had occurred with myself, Aida and Anna, A3's connection to a favorite movie she had selected "intuitively" and she explored this connection using free associative film analysis even if in her case it was not followed in such a formal manner. Nevertheless this process seemed to enhance self-awareness and self-acceptance, empowering her to take proactive steps in dealing with real life situations.

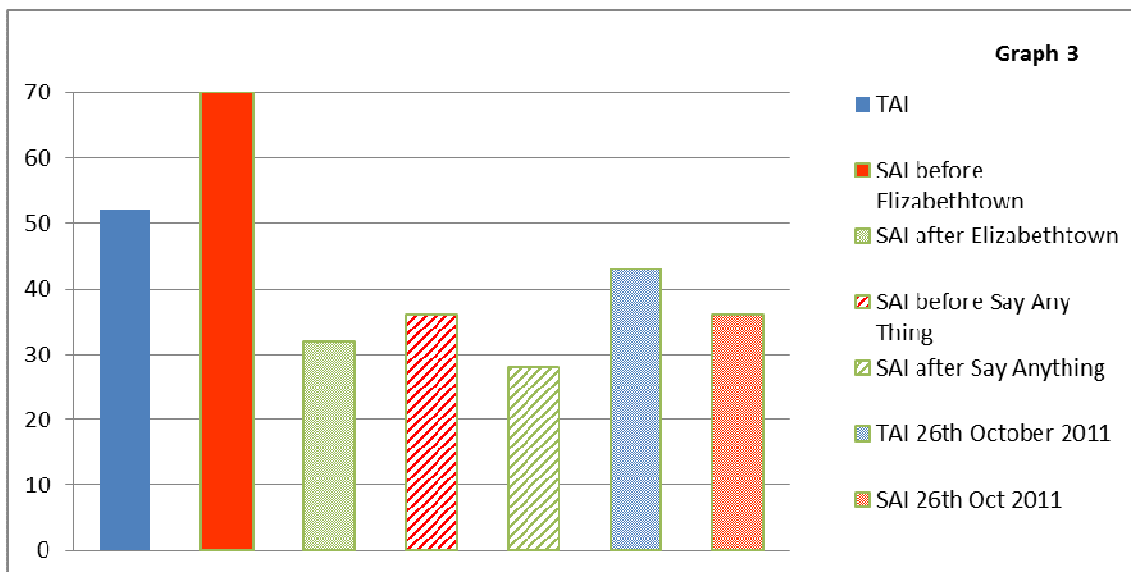
At the end of the 2009/10 academic year my connection with the group ceased completely, but I often wondered about the volunteers. To my delight, in September 2011, I re-encountered A3, A4 and A9 when they became undergraduate students. They had all entered the university degree course of their choice and were enjoying it very much. They remembered the project and when I asked if I could hold a final interview and repeat the STAI test they agreed readily. I met A3 on 26th October 2011 and we did a final interview. She was adapting very well to university life and appeared happy. A3 completed the STAI questionnaires again and her SAI (36) and TAI (43) readings reflect this. Her SAI is the same as it was before she watched *Say Anything*, when she was in a relaxed and expectant mood. Significantly, there is an almost ten-point drop in

her TAI. This is significant because, according to Spielberg, higher TAI leads to more frequent development of elevated SAI.

In this interview, A3 told me that the work we did together with films had been very important for her at the time and continued to be relevant. She still watched *Howl's Moving Castle* and thought about Sophie. In fact, she informed me, Sophie had been her companion on many adventures in her own life. Despite the fact that it is an animated movie, her close connection with Sophie helped her believe that what happened to Sophie could happen to her in her real life circumstances. The film gave her a model.

A3's involvement with the character had evolved. Initially (and still at times) she had identified with Sophie's shyness and her preference to be invisible (the way she locks herself away in the hatter's workshop). But when the spell is cast on her, Sophie realizes that appearances are not so important. People like us for who we are; everyone liked the old woman despite her spent body and cranky ways. Sophie (and, with her help, A3) learned to look beyond appearances; when she did so, Howl too could see her true nature. Two years after she first worked on the film trial, A3 had progressed to identifying with Sophie's triumph, which occurs because she learned to accept herself as she was, even if she appeared to be a cackling old hag. This more extended and deeper reading of *Howl's Moving Castle* also showed A3 that the true magic of the film for her is this acceptance of self and not the flying tricks she connected with initially and consider magic. The evil spell was broken when Sophie learned to accept herself. This acceptance might be able to break spells binding A3 too.

Graph 3: A3's STAI results during the course of the work



Overall, the project seemed to have helped A3. Her longer answers indicate that watching *Elizabethtown* offered her positive representations of three things that were very important for her at the time she watched it. One, it demonstrated that we are not necessarily directly responsible for everything bad that happens to us. Two, watching Drew overcome his problems showed her a positive model that allowed her think she too could conquer her problems too. Three, one of the important steps in Drew's success was making friends and accepted their support - the movie encouraged her to look to her friends for support as well. She did and she was not disappointed. Our general discussion on anxiety and the importance of developing strategies that include watching movies and reflecting on this and these activities seemed to help the process. Her STAI questionnaires revealed a dramatic reduction in SAI readings during the course of the trial, which must also have contributed greatly to her ability to look at her situation objectively. In the long term, watching *Elizabethtown* helped A3 improve her coping skills and develop appropriate strategies for dealing with her anxiety. The individual feedback sessions and second screening seemed to reinforce this approach. Perhaps the A3's work with *Elizabethtown* could be seen as offering a very positive example of what Holland considered as the first two levels of contact with literature: relaxation and enjoyment resulting from the comprehension of the fictional narrative within the context of the readers' or viewer's life.

However, A3's experience with *Howl's Moving Castle* appears to be different – if *Elizabethtown* showed her an external model that appealed to her and helped her at a particular moment in time because of the specific circumstances she was experiencing, *Howl's Moving Castle* seemed to have a deeper personal and timeless appeal for her. Viewing it, reviewing it and considering her connections with it seemed to offer her increased awareness and acceptance of self. This seems to be another type of “hovering.” Can we “hover” this way to any movie or does there have to be something in it to let us do this? There are all questions that I cannot answer now, but that might be worth inquiring into in the future.

Two powerful relevant events appeared to occur for A3 because of her deep contact with two different films: *Elizabethtown* and *Howl's Moving Castle*. “Hovering” over *Elizabethtown* seemed to offer A3 an alternative perspective on her real life situation and appeared to furnish her with appropriate coping skill, not only to deal with this situation but others. It truly seemed to offer her an alternative paradigm that

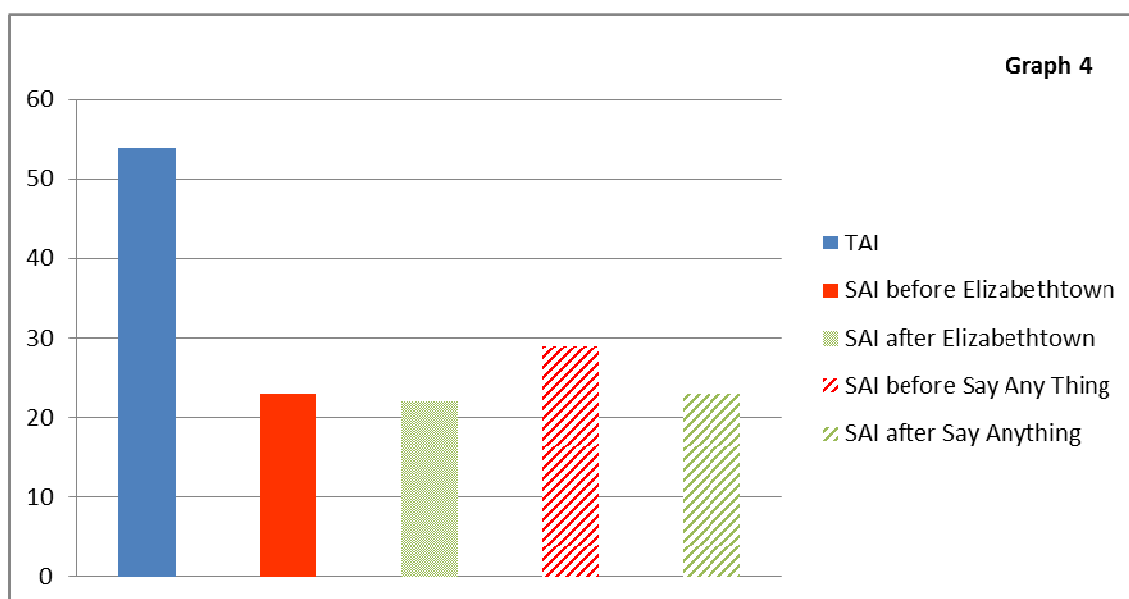
allowed her to construct a bridge to her future. There was an examination of circumstances and an evaluation of attitudes, but outside of these connections there did not appear to be a lot of introspection associated with this form of “hovering” over her reactions to *Elizabethtown*. I had many questions about A3’s connection with *Elizabethtown*. Why did A3 react like this to *Elizabethtown*? Was her reaction so strong because she was experiencing a real state of crisis? Was the connection only due to her circumstances or is there something in *Elizabethtown* that facilitates this interaction?

Also, I wondered if A3 could have done this work with *Howl’s Moving Castle*, if she had not first been open up to the potential possibilities by her work with *Elizabethtown*. I did not think so because although the connection was present in *Howl’s Moving Castle*, she did not really understand it and it would be difficult for her to make the connections she later made with the movie because her SAI levels were so high. I was also struck by how much of the work A3 did, on her own. I was never really a party to A3’s free associative analysis, I simply indicated how the process worked. I never asked her to tell me where her associative strings were leading her, I just indicated how she could follow them and she wanted to do this. She inhabited the space in between her mind and her movie and constructed her model of self that fitted her frame. Her work demonstrated to me that this model can never be a forced or uncomfortable model.

4.1.3 An analysis of the work with A4

A4 is another curious case: she registered a medium TAI score but very low SAIs throughout the screenings, indicating that she reacted very well both to the idea of watching a movie and to the films screened. The trial permitted A4 to watch a movie for pleasure and not feel guilty about this. It helped her to understand that relaxation was a necessary feature of a productive and successful life.

Graph 4: A4's STAI reactions to watching *Elizabethtown* and *Anything*



In the initial *Elizabethtown* screening, A4 scored a striking reduction from TAI to SAI-before (54; 23; 22). Because her SAI-before was so low, there was very little room for further reduction. Perhaps this is the reason that there was a mere one-point drop in her SAI readings during the course of the screening. Her SAI scores related to the *Say Anything* trial are slightly higher (-; 29; 26), but still very low.

What is most interesting about A4 is what she wrote in her longer answers. She commented that she felt better after watching *Elizabethtown*. However, this puzzled her because she had felt confused while watching the movie. She did not really understand why a formal school activity would be associated with such a frivolous film³. Despite

³ In a later conversation A4 told me that watching *Elizabethtown* in an educational context had been very important. She realized that she had gotten to a very “earnest” place and felt she should only watch movies and read books that had a strong message; hence her choice of *The Boy with the Striped Pajamas* for her film review. The fact that I showed an apparently trivial film in a formal context confused her at first, and her reaction to the film confounded her even more. However, she said that the follow-up work

her misgivings, and initial displeasure, at the end she realized to her surprise that she felt better, especially after watching the road trip sequences. She wrote that the movie gave her an alternative perspective on life; it showed her that we should place events in their appropriate context. She connected with Drew's feeling of responsibility for his failure and his inability to forget it, because she is like that. However, the film taught her that life becomes easier if we accept the things that happen to us naturally and peacefully, whether they are good or bad. The road trip was her favorite part, because it shows that life is more important than any failure we may experience. The mere fact of being alive should be the central focus of our thoughts, she proposed.

A4 participated actively in the class debate and also wanted to learn about free associative film criticism. Therefore, we watched *The Boy with the Striped Pyjamas* together. Significantly, when I asked her why she had picked the film, she answered that she thought it was a serious worthwhile theme. She enjoyed the film at an intellectual level, but she did not meet this movie. We watched the movie and compared interpretations; I helped her with the contextualization of events and we discussed the author's approach in the original novel. But as in the case of A8's choice of David Koepf's *Secret Window*, there was no free associative spark, so this screening in terms of this free association was not particularly relevant.

However, our discussion of how "movies meet us" was very pertinent, because she immediately recognized films that had met her – she loves films that bring nature, human stories, and if possible magic together. She thought of James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), Andrew Adamson *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*, (2008) and Chris Weitz (2007) *The Golden Compass*. I asked why she had not picked one of those for her project, especially as the last two were based on books. She answered that before being involved in our project, she would have felt ashamed of admitting publicly that she liked such films as they appeared frivolous to her but she was no longer ashamed. When, she realized that she did not really have any personal connection points with the film she had chosen for the Reading Contract project, she said that she would like to do free association with one of these films, but unfortunately we were not able to schedule a viewing. Still, I was happy that she had reached this awareness and acceptance,

showed her how important it was for her to watch movies she liked intuitively, even if they tended towards the fantastic, such as *Avatar* (2010). I will expand on this later in this section.

because her STAI readings reveal that she reacts very well to the whole movie-going experience, even with films that she does not find particularly stimulating.

A4 also reacted well to the group screening of *Say Anything*. Before and after watching *Say Anything* A4's SAI scores were slightly higher than they had been at equivalent stages of the *Elizabethtown* screening, but they were still low (29; 26). Though A4 wrote that she felt better after watching *Say Anything*, her connection seemed to be more superficial than the connection to *Elizabethtown*. She saw this movie as a well-produced love story, and she always feels better after watching these because they help her think that she will one day experience such a love. Her favorite part of the movie was when Diane went to visit her father in prison and began to forgive him despite everything. Diane was her favorite character, because A4 could relate personally to her academic choices and goals. A4 also enjoyed the fact that Diane fell for an ordinary guy, despite being a "brain". A4 only watches one or two films a month during the school year, because she focuses on her school work. Watching a movie is more than a hobby for her and she looks for films that will teach her new things and transmit new ideas. But she added, "I have also learned that they can help us relax and this is important too." A point which I felt could be very important for her (*cf.* Ap:183-4).

A4 was the second volunteer who completed the feedback questionnaire at the end of the 2009/10 academic year and I will present her answers below:

QUESTION 1. For me watching a movie is seeing a succession of images that make us think and teach us something. Every film carries a different message, thus we may learn something good or something bad. We must also be aware of the fact that the film can mould our characters, we have to be faithful to our personalities as we extract the message it transmits to us; whether this be positive or negative.

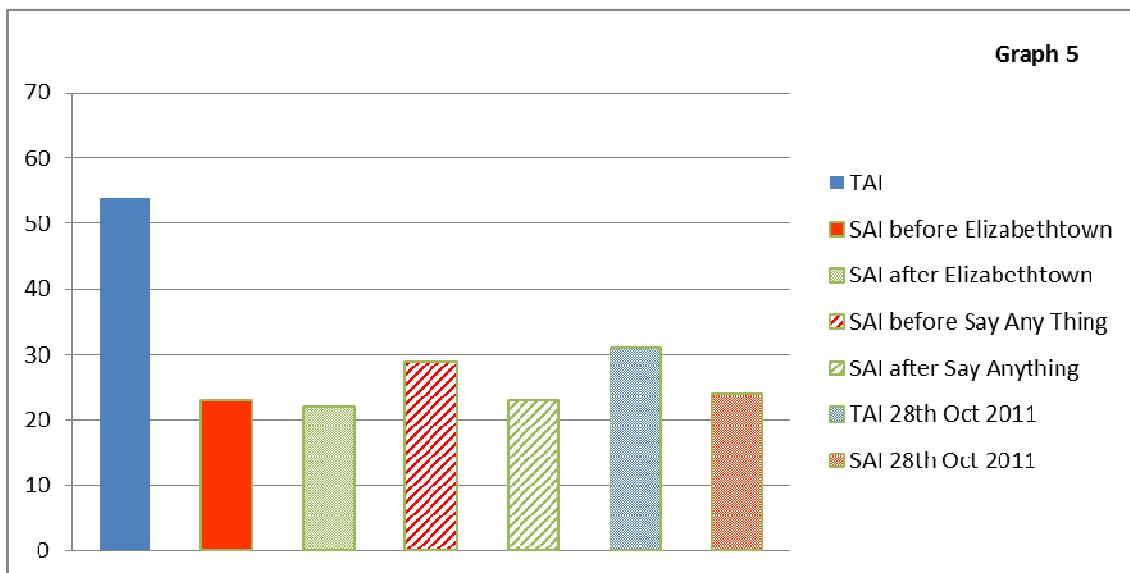
QUESTION 2. All new experiences (when they are good) have an effect on our lives. One of these was the Reading Contract as I had never done anything like it before. ... I loved it. Even though I am in the science and technology area, I think projects like this in the Portuguese language subject are very important. Besides helping us to grow and be more confident as people, they are an "object" that contribute greatly to general education.

QUESTION 3. I think this project was quite interesting. It was a good experience. Besides assisting the Reading Contract project, more than anything else it helped show me the relevance of cinema in our lives. Films can be key objects in learning more about ourselves (Ap: 185-6).

These answers show that at the end of the trial, A4 has a very different opinion of the potential role of literature and cinema in her life. Her first answer indicates that she still sees films as educators, but the other answers display a new willingness to embrace the movie-going experience on different levels.

I met A4 again on 28th October 2011, I did a final interview with her and she repeated the STAI questionnaires. As in A3's case, she was 18 years old and a first-year student on the university degree course of her choice. A4 was happy with university life and enjoying her degree. I was surprised at her STAI results: her SAI registered at a very low 24 and her TAI at 31. While her SAI reading was relatively stable, her TAI had dropped dramatically, by over 20 points. This is not normal, as TAI is supposed to be relatively stable and A4 did not seem like a girl who had suffered dramatic real life trauma.

Graph 5 A4's STAI reactions during the course of the work



When, I told A4 about her STAI results, A4 explained that the 11th grade had been really traumatic for her. Just before the first STAI trial, a very close friend had disappointed her deeply. This had eroded her ability to trust her friends and classmates. Because she lived in a rural environment, it was impossible to make new friends and she had felt quite isolated from her former friends. University had given her a new start, a new life, new friends and she had embraced this wholeheartedly. She felt that she was having the best of both worlds at the time because she had been able to rekindle the contact with her old friends, especially those who were in university with her.

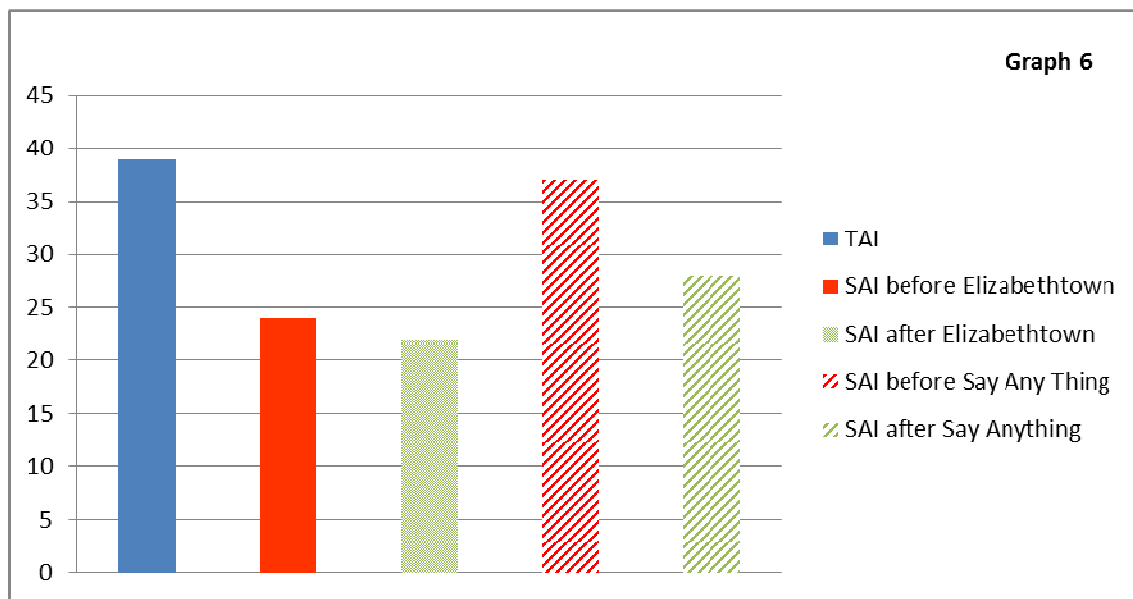
Before starting the film analysis project, she had felt like she was trapped but the project had helped her to see outside of her situation. The road trip, where Drew drives into self discovery, helped her see that one needs to take time to understand who one is and to move outside of one's own situations. Also, it had been liberating for her to realize that a film as apparently light and flimsy as *Elizabethtown* could be significant. This allowed her to embrace the kind of films she loves, like *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *The Golden Compass* – not because they are good or worthy, but because she knows she needs pure fantasy and there is nothing wrong with that.

This conversation made me regret again not having repeated the TAI questionnaire in the larger trials when *Say Anything* was screened. However, I was pleased that significant contact with fictional worlds had improved someone's ability to cope with real world events. Also working with A4 demonstrated how working with films, especially when it is tied in with the type of exercises used during this trial, can allow individual viewers to extract what is most important for them from the literary experience. In A4's case, the most important thing was to understand that relaxing with a film or a book is important for her. It let her embrace the kind of fiction she is drawn to, without feeling diminished, adding imagination and magic to a normally more scientifically oriented life.

4.1.4 An analysis of the work with A5

A5 was the first boy to participate in both screenings. He scored (39: 24: 21) during the *Elizabethtown* screening and (- 37: 28) during the *Say Anything* screening, writing that he felt better after each. There is only a slight decrease in state anxiety from before to after watching *Elizabethtown*. His SAI score at the end of *Elizabethtown* was only one point above the absolute minimum, and eighteen below his standard TAI. His initial SAI is considerably higher at the outset of the second screening, but dropped by 9 points during the course of the session. So his response of feeling better is again supported by his STAI results.

Graph 6 A5's STAI results after watching *Elizabethtown* and *Anything*



A5's long answers reflect his SAI scores. About his thoughts during and after *Elizabethtown*, A5 wrote: "My thoughts at the moment are of no great importance, I am so calm and have no real worries, so I just thought about watching the movie and having fun." Holly's on-stage farewell to her husband was his favorite part, and Samson (Drew's cousin's son) his favorite character. The film reminded him of what strong relationships are like, but this was more of a passing comment than a strong personal connection (Ap:187). A5's answers indicate that *Elizabethtown* reinforced a degree of relaxation that he felt because of his general temperament and the anticipation of watching a movie. A5 wrote that watching a movie represents well-being for him; it allows him to have fun, relax and calm down. He normally watches about ten films a month, depending on the amount of free time he has (cf. Ap:188).

Before watching *Say Anything*, A5's SAI score (37) was quite close to his standard TAI reading of 39. However, at the end of the screening this had reduced to 28, which is a significant reduction. A5 wrote that he felt better after watching the movie because any film he watches, even if it is not a great movie, distracts him from his life and allows him to enter the world of the film. The party was his favorite part of the movie; Josh (Lloyd's nephew) was his favorite character because he is funny and brings good dynamics to the movie. As he was watching the movie, he thought, "Diane and Lloyd have to get together", on the other hand after watching *Say Anything*, he wondered how such a simple film could be so captivating. Again there does not appear

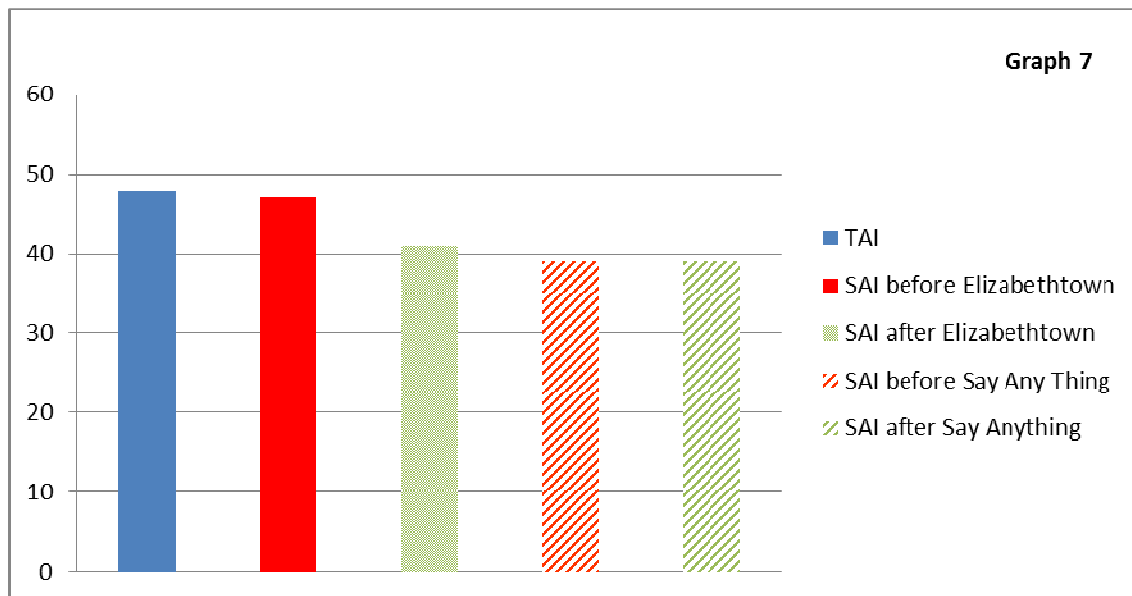
to be a strong personal connection, but the movie-going experience appears to offer A5 the ability to relax and distance himself from his actual situation (*cf.* Ap:189)..

A5 participated in the class discussion and demonstrated interest in analyzing the movie *Blindness* free associatively. We watched this together on 18th March 2010. We also talked about his STAI results at that time. While we watched the movie together I noticed that A5 appeared to connect with some scenes. He was intrigued by the whole concept of blindness or lack of vision throughout the film, but his connection seemed to be intellectual rather than emotive. So our discussion of the movie was mainly intellectual. Nevertheless, he reacted viscerally to scenes of physical violence, but as Spielberg's initial trials demonstrated, onscreen physical violence produces very strong anxiety reactions. I instructed him on how to do free associative analysis, but I am not sure if he did this. I think in A5's case the project was a pleasant activity. He participated freely and willingly in all the stages, but did not discuss his personal outcomes very much. While we watched *Blindness*, he told me that the concepts I had talked about had helped him appreciate and enjoy the movie-going experience. As with A4, our work had eliminated guilt for spending time on these activities.

4.1.5 An analysis of the work with A9

A9 was the other male student who did both screenings. His results are different from those of the others. All of A9's STAI readings remain very close throughout the trial, varying by only 9 points and staying in (or very close to) the medium score range. A9 wrote that he felt the same after watching both movies, so there is a correspondence between what he actually felt and the STAI readings recorded.

Graph 7 A9's STAI results after watching *Elizabethtown* and *Anything*



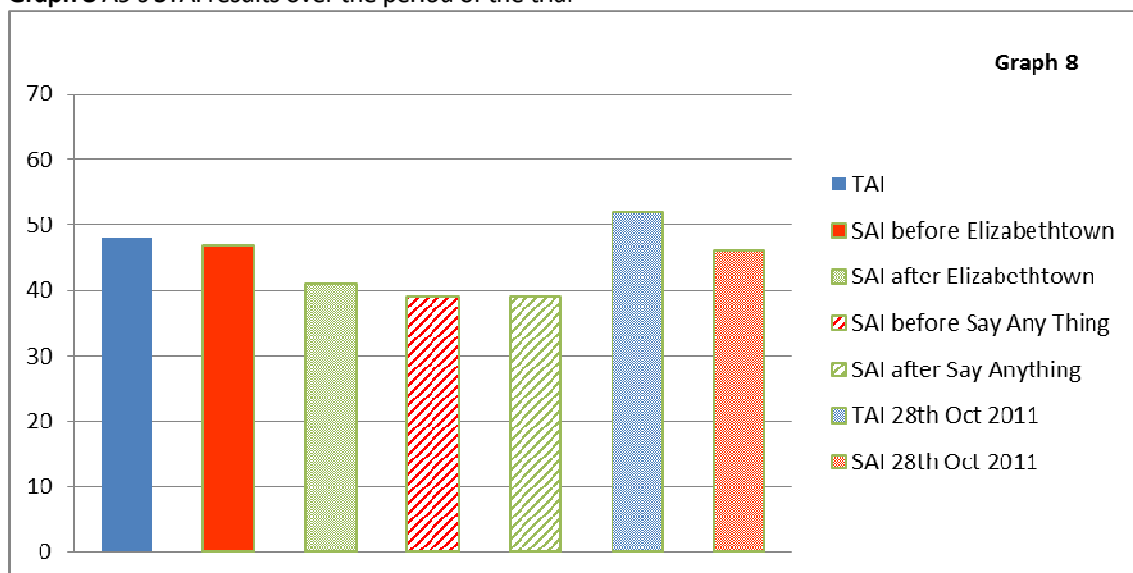
After watching *Elizabethtown*, A9 wrote that he felt calmer and had felt happy and comfortable while watching the movie, but also more “electric”. Despite these sensations, he wrote that he felt the same after watching the film because aside from a passing feeling of happiness and calmness, the film did not have a lasting effect on him. *Elizabethtown* reminded A9 about things that had happened in his life, especially romantic situations. Drew was his favorite character because he showed that to achieve success, sometimes one has to fail first; the road trip was his favorite part of the movie because it showed a different side of Drew. All these comments indicate quite a personal interaction between film and viewer; however, as with other individual trials, volunteers felt better after watching a movie only if they sensed that the feelings experienced during the movie could be transferred to their real life situations (*cf.* Ap:191).

A9 also wrote he felt the same after watching *Say Anything*, and his identical SAI-before and after readings seems to reflect this. He enjoyed the movie. He thought that it was again about love, and lots of fun; he felt better while watching it, but the ending did not live up to his expectations. Again there were significant personal connections with the film. He wrote that he was going through a similar experience and as such he experienced personal flashbacks and many happy thoughts while watching the movie. Diane giving Lloyd the pen to end their relationship reminded him of something that happened to him. His favorite scene was the one where Lloyd uses his nephew Josh as a guitar, because it is a really funny scene. He enjoyed the whole love

story, even though it was conventional and traditional. Curiously, Corey (one of Lloyd’s friends who tried to commit suicide when her boyfriend finished their relationship) was his favorite character, because she shows the possible extent of personal obsession with another person. A9 was the student who watched most movies, calculating that he saw about 24 per month. For him, watching a movie is being part of another’s story; most of the films he watches are stories. He writes that it is “like they give us a part of another life, it’s beautiful.” Despite the fact that A9 does not appear to feel he can transfer the movie-going experience outside of the moment, watching films seems to be very important to him (*cf.* Ap:192).

A9 came to the individual feedback session to find out his STAI results. I was surprised that he was the student who corresponded to A9. During the screening and class session, he had appeared one of the most easy-going students, yet he scored consistently high medium scores. He was surprised by his sustained medium anxiety reading, as he said he normally felt relaxed about difficult situations. However, the scores were repeated during the *Say Anything* screening. On 28th October 2011, we had a final interview, this time A9 filled out the SAI and TAI questionnaires without associating the exercise with viewing a movie. He was 17 years old and a first year university student. His scores were quite high: SAI (46); TAI (52).

Graph 8 A9’s STAI results over the period of the trial



I was surprised at these results and he explained his situation. He told me that very early in life, he had realized that he had a very anxious nature. If said that if he did not control this, he made the life of the people around him hell. He developed strategies

to help him deal with his anxiety and let him relax; this works so well that on a daily basis he does not feel anxious. One of his strategies is watching movies, which is why he watches so many. At the time of this 2011 feedback interview, he was getting used to university life and preparing for the first round of tests. He admitted that his usual strategies were not working as well as they had in other times, and he needed to work on new ones for this situation. But he was confident that he would be able to deal with this situation as he had dealt with others – “after all, it’s only my biology,” he joked.

Again, A9 offers a different scenario and different coping skills. This is perhaps one of the great advantages (and the beauty) of this work: it allows each volunteer to work individually to achieve the results that are most appropriate for them. The blend of working with anxiety scales and free associative analysis seems to permit a very comprehensive approach and all the volunteers who worked on the program seemed to obtain benefits. I found the results very encouraging.

4.2 Individual work with Anita

The work with individual volunteers on trial 5, though completed grounded in film analysis, was more directed than I tried to use volunteers' contact to achieve specific results. I continued this approach with Anita, where I developed a working method revolving around *Elizabethtown*. This film permitted all three approaches – escape, free associative recognition of unique identity theme and passages for contemplation at different stages of the work with Anita. Significantly, we worked intensively together for less than a month in November/December 2010. After this she continued to apply the methods developed autonomously.

Anita had just turned 17 when her parents approached me in October of 2010. I had carried out some of the group film screenings in Anita's school, during the 2009/10 academic year, but not with her class. Her parents found out about my project from Anita's homeroom teacher, who had been involved in the group trials. They wanted to know more about my project, and we discussed what I was doing, the methods and outcomes. After this conversation, they asked me if I would consider doing film trials with their daughter, whom they described as deeply unhappy and struggling in her academic and social environment. Anita had been attending a psychologist but she had refused to return. They approached me because cinema and music were the only things that still interested Anita. They hoped that working with one of these might be able to help Anita break through what they termed her "wall of indifference"⁴.

⁴ Her parents described her as shy and introverted by nature, but she also generous, pretty and intelligent. During junior and middle school she had been one of the most popular and successful students in her class. In hindsight her parents recognized that she had never really wanted to socialize outside of school or family contexts. She did not like going to friends' houses, preferring family outings or inviting friends to her home. Her mother said she had encouraged this attitude at the time because she felt that it was safer. Now, she regretted not having helped Anita become more independent sooner. When they thought about it, Anita's parents felt that her rural primary and middle schools, where she had appeared happy, had functioned as an extension of her family life.

However, despite her shyness, Anita did not have problems with public performances and enjoyed participating in public dance exhibitions and making oral presentations in school. At the beginning of the 2008/9 academic year, aged 15, Anita moved to a high school in a larger town outside her school district, leaving her former friends and colleagues behind. Her mother questioned this choice, asking if she would not miss her friends. Anita responded that she had no real friends, just acquaintances, and she wanted to start afresh. However, despite enjoying the school work initially, she had found the social aspects of this new, larger school difficult to deal with. She wanted to participate in social events organized by her school or colleagues, but she did not like to go alone. She would ask her parents and younger sister to accompany her, which was not usual for her age. As the year progressed she had began to isolate herself more and more from her colleagues.

Though her academic performance was floundering despite her intelligence and former success, Anita's parents were most alarmed at her self-isolation and extreme unhappiness. They had always been concerned about her shyness, but they only became acutely worried about Anita during the 2009/10 academic year. They were alerted by her homeroom teacher that her essays reflected hopelessness, despair, and a desire to disappear from the world. Teachers were also concerned because, although Anita was polite in her dealings with others, she isolated herself in class and seemed lost in the group. There were no indications of bullying. In fact, classmates liked Anita but could not reach her. Anita's parents knew that she was having social problems at school, and that she sometimes locked herself in the bathroom during breaks, but they had not been able to help her. They were very concerned about her state of despondency. They had even noticed physical expressions of anxiety as well. Anita's breathing would halt involuntarily and she would have to compensate by taking in large gulps of air. Her family doctor suspected that this was due to her high level of anxiety and his diagnosis was confirmed by medical exams which demonstrated that her respiratory system was working well physically. The spasms were a physical manifestation of her anxiety.

At this clinical diagnosis, Anita agreed to seek professional help. She worked with a local psychologist who diagnosed her as clinically depressed and she began a form of CBT therapy. Though this alleviated her symptoms initially, she discontinued sessions after a short period, saying that they were not really helping her and that she would rather deal with the situation herself. The academic year ended and the summer passed without major incidents. However, Anita spent her time within her family circle and continued to have halted breathing manifestations.

At the beginning of the 2010/11 academic year, the despondency and hopelessness returned. Despite her natural academic abilities and the fact that she was in her last year in high school, she had little interest in her work and her academic performance was very poor. She had no plans for her future and continued to isolate herself from social interaction. Even at home, she spent most of her time in her room and related little with her family. Her parents wanted her to resume her therapeutic sessions, but she refused, claiming they had not helped her previously. At this point her parents sought alternatives and when they learned about my project they approached me.

I stressed that I could only work with Anita as a teacher, facilitating her ability to extract personal significance from encounters with films using free associative film criticism according to Lichtenstein's identity theme theory. I highlighted the fact that I was not a therapist nor was I going to be working as such. Though we could talk about some psychological subjects, I would not construct a psychological profile for Anita, nor would I develop a treatment program. I emphasized that if I worked with Anita, our discussion would be based on cinema and Anita's reactions to certain types of films. It would also involve an academic discussion of the concept of anxiety and the use of Spielberg's STAI inventories, but only to determine how exposure to certain types of films might influence Anita's trait and state anxiety. Remembering the work with A3, I commented that we might use some of Anita's writings to reinforce positive connections she made with films, but the work would be based on her reactions to movies. I stipulated one condition: if our work did not help Anita, she would agree to resume therapy. She accepted the conditions because she said that she really liked both cinema and the discussion of psychological issues.

Before agreeing to work with Anita, we met and discussed the project generally. This meeting had two principal objectives. The first was to introduce the concepts associated with the work and get Anita's direct responses to ensure that she was comfortable about working with movies in this manner. The second was to select the first movie for the screenings.

We talked about Heinz Lichtenstein's unique identity theme theory, Holland's use of free associative film criticism and of interpreting the latter to gain insight into the former. She was fascinated by the concept of unique identity theme and its implication that each person had the right to have a unique form of being in the world and interacting with it. Also, she enjoyed the idea implied in Lichtenstein's theory that anyone can aspire to happiness as this can be achieved through awareness of identity theme and by taking this into consideration when making decisions. She was happy to try to work with films this way. I did not speak to her about anxiety at this stage as I did not want to introduce too many different issues in one meeting and her reaction to the concept of free associative film analysis and Lichtenstein's unique identity theme had been very positive and since her reaction to these I did not want to distract from this idea. Therefore, we moved onto the next step which was to select a film free associatively for analysis.

However, when I explained this process to her, as laid out in Chapter Two, Anita told me that no movie came to mind immediately. She loves movies and watches about twenty a month. However, she said that she rarely watched a film more than once. The exceptions were psychological thrillers, which she liked to watch more often to understand the details of the plot and the *Harry Potter* series, but she had not seen these movies recently. She did not think she had ever connected with a movie in a “free associative” manner. She wrote later that watching a film means entering a parallel universe, peopled by characters, similar to people in the real world despite being fictional. It signifies entering the minds of other people, especially directors, and understanding how they see the world. Therefore, one can say that her general interaction with movies was rational rather than emotive. The only film that came to her mind was Alan Coulter’s *Remember Me* (2010). However, she did not think she had made a real free associative connection with it. She liked it and felt it “met” her current mood. She did not know if this qualified as a free associative choice, or if it was just a film she had appreciated at a particular moment in time.

At this point, especially as Anita did not have a strong free associative choice, I was not sure whether I to start the work together with open free associative film criticism to *Remember Me*, or to follow the method that had worked well with A3: to use a combination of structured viewing of a movie like *Elizabethtown*, followed by free associative film criticism to a film of Anita’s choice as had worked well with A3. Open free associative film analysis had worked very well with Anna and I, but it has also been a difficult process and I wondered if it would be too harrowing for Anita to embark on this given her situation. Also, at the time I worked with Anita, the only teenager who had done something approaching free associative film analysis had been A3. However, I had not spoken to her about this immediately after she had done it, I had just had heard her teacher’s comments. (I would only get her own feedback a year after I worked with Anita).

Also, A3 had really benefitted from dwelling on the positive ideas that she had connected with while watching *Elizabethtown* before doing her free associative criticism to *Howl’s Moving Castle*. Thinking about *Elizabethtown’s* story and choosing to believe its message to her, had allowed A3 to develop coping strategies and deal with her problems. I was not sure if she would have been able to do this film associative exercise, if she had not watched *Elizabethtown* and connected with its story and

absorbed elements of this film and the general methods used in the STAI trails as they speak to the relevance and value of developing connections with film.

Therefore, I decided to watch *Remember Me* to get a better idea of whether I could use this film for open free associative analysis, given the difficulties this process can entail and the time it involves, or whether it would be better to begin our screenings with *Elizabethtown* and start with Anita's writing to this film that had worked well before.

Remember Me follows the story of Tyler Hawkins (played by Robert Pattinson), a drifting undergraduate trying to find his way in life. Despite his privileged New York background, he is a troubled young man trying to come to terms with life within the context of a dysfunctional family; his elder brother's suicide and his father's (Pierce Brosnen) emotional distancing from the family. Tyler begins a relationship with fellow undergraduate Ally Craig (Emilie de Ravin) and despite the fact that Tyler initiated this relationship as an attempt to get revenge on Craig's policeman father (Chris Cooper), he finds love and hope with her. Notwithstanding the drama and intrigue of their past lives, Tyler and Ally's genuine encounter of self and other brokered through their relationship brings them to a point where they can assist the healing process in both broken families. However, the film ends tragically, with Tyler's implicit demise in his father's 92nd floor Twin Tower office on September 11th, 2001.

This ending transmits a real sense of hopelessness as it annihilates fledgling hope and magnifies the emotional conundrums faced by all the characters at the outset. Because of the tremendous performances from the entire cast, I felt devastated when the movie ended. I grieved for Tyler and Ally's initial family tragedies, rejoiced at their new found hope, but at the end I felt betrayed because all the suffering had been for nothing. The survivors who had begun to hope and move outside their crippled shadow existences were slapped down again and left in a far worse situation than the one of tragic pain of the opening scenes. Roger Ebert described the film as a Greek tragedy, "... a well-made movie. I cared about the characters. I felt for them." I was in wholehearted agreement with his appeal: "Liberate them from the plot's destiny, which is an anvil around their necks, and you might have something" (Ebert, 2010). After watching *Remember Me* I decided not to use it with Anita because it would feed into the mood of hopelessness that she was experiencing at the time. I did not feel qualified to explore this kind of fatalism with her at that point.

Therefore, I decided to start the work with her, adapting the method that had worked well with A3. We would start with Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown*, (that Anita had not seen before) as this film consistently reduced anxiety levels across all audiences during the STAI trials and perhaps Anita would connect with scenes from it and be able to write free associatively to these connections. I thought that she would enjoy it because of its humour, music and subject matter. It might work well for her as it offers alternative solutions for contemporary problems while questioning relevant issues and attitudes. I was also mindful of how important Lichtenstein's unique identity theme theory had been to all the free associative film analysis volunteers as well as A3.

We began work together on 18th November 2010. I explained of free associative film criticism, viewing *Elizabethtown*, explanation of Heidegger's conceptualization of anxiety and STAI questionnaires. I explained that we would be using *Elizabethtown* rather than *Remember Me*. She liked the idea of watching a new movie. We talked again about Lichtenstein's understanding of a unique identity theme, emphasizing that there is no good or bad theme, just a need for each individual to find his/her unique one and be mindful of this when making decisions. This concept would become very important for Anita. I explained that free association worked better when it was directly linked to a specific scene, and that we would watch *Elizabethtown* together to see if we could identify scenes that she connected with. I showed Anita the opening scenes from the film explaining how they had connected with me and I described how I had written my free association to these scenes. I also explained that this free association had helped me understand part of my identity theme - my tendency to blame myself for things that go wrong, irrespective of whether they are my fault or not.

I also spoke about the road trip, explaining that associating to these sequences reminded me that I need to make time for fun and spontaneity in my daily life. I explained that I had watched those film sequences dozens of times because of the different trials, but they still seemed to tap an "inner joy" button. When I saw them again they still reminded me that taking time for joy and spontaneity is both necessary and possible. She said that she thought that she understood the concept of free associative selection and would be alert for this as she watched the movie. She felt that she would be able to write free associatively too.

I then introduced the STAI questionnaires and Heidegger's concept of anxiety. Anita wanted to know more about anxiety, especially the separation between fear and

anxiety. She explained that there were things that she did not understand about herself. On the one hand, performing tasks that made other people very anxious, like making class oral presentations or performing on stage, did not bother her much. She would worry beforehand, but as soon as she was involved in them her fear would disappear. On the other hand, what she was most afraid of was the crippling “fear” that “fell on her” at times, and seemed to come out of nowhere. She did not expand on the things that caused this debilitating fear, and I did not ask her about them.

I explained Heidegger’s theory as presented earlier so that she would know the difference between fear and anxiety. We talked about the way fear is motivated by external factors and because it is associated with an external and tangible object it is easier to deal with than anxiety. Since anxiety is generated by the individual’s own personal way of being in the world and comes from the inside, it is faceless, nebulous and as such more difficult to deal with. However, both are born out of experiences in life. Using examples from Anita’s own life, her reactions to oral presentations, I illustrated how she had learned to deal with fear. Making an oral presentation is not a problem to her because she has overcome the real and concrete fears associated with this. Her past experience has shown her that she can do this well. I explained that anxiety on the one hand, is harder to deal with because it has no face, but on the other, all the philosophers who wrote about anxiety, like Heidegger and Sartre also wrote about its positive potential. This implies that it can be managed too. Also, I explained that though anxiety has a more abstract source; it still produces very real physical manifestations in our lives. I suggested that perhaps strategies for dealing with anxiety might involve recognizing its existence and seeing how to become more comfortable within ourselves. After all Heidegger had proposed that a resolute Dasein can deal with anxiety positively. I mentioned that Anita’s free associative writings might help this process as they should offer knowledge of her unique identity theme.

Anita grasped the notion quite easily and it appeared to bring her relief. As we were talking, it struck me for the first time that trait anxiety levels could be seen as an element of each individual’s unique identity theme or way of interacting with the world. Therefore, I explained that her trait anxiety was not her fault. It was just an expression of her biology and the way she had learned to interact with the world. I referred to my blue eyes and her brown ones. Mine, a consequence of Anglo-Saxon genes, do not equip me as well for the Iberian sun as her brown ones do. However, with the correct

coping strategy (i.e., good sunglasses), I have no problems with the brighter sunlight. Following the proposal that there is inherently no such thing as a good or bad identity theme, just the understanding and acceptance of this, I introduced the idea that anyone can be happy as long as they take their unique identity theme into consideration when making decisions.

We then moved on to the discussion of the STAI questionnaires. I explained that the TAI questionnaire is used to establish baseline trait anxiety levels. The SAI illustrated the way we feel at a particular moment and varies as a result of circumstances and sentiments. While I was aware of Anita's situation and we talked about anxiety, my primary concern at the beginning of the screenings was to emphasize the literary aspects of our work together, to ensure that Anita understood these and felt comfortable using them. Thus, after she completed the SAI and TAI questionnaires, we returned to the subject of free associative film analysis. I did not want Anita to confuse me with a therapist, nor did I see myself in that role. Therefore, I established the tone of our work as, analysis of films and academic discussion of topics related to anxiety (Heidegger and Spielberg) and identity (Lichtenstein and Erikson).

Discussion and analysis of films was the central element of our work together. This was always the register of our meetings but, because art is interpreted through living experiences, delicate issues arose and were addressed. However, despite the nature of the subjects discussed, the discourse was always moderated through interaction with films. We spoke about Anita's connection with characters and scenes. I was aware that psychological issues must underlie Anita's high anxiety levels however, we never discussed these and I never built a psychological profile for her. The only personal questions we discussed were of a practical nature e.g. possible career choices and approaches. Issues were always discussed through film and I think this made the whole process easier for Anita.

Anita completed the TAI and SAI questionnaires quite happily before we watched the movie together. I graded the STAI forms after Anita had settled down to watch the movie. Despite the background information I had received about Anita, her TAI score (69/80) surprised me; it was one of the highest TAIs I had encountered throughout the trials. During our discussion she had appeared quite at ease; this was reflected in her much lower SAI (37/80) score. The SAI result was an indicator that film, even its anticipation, worked positively in Anita's life. I was relieved that our

conversation, though it dealt with complex issues, had not affected her anxiety levels negatively. Later, she told me that one of the very positive aspects of our work together was that it helped her to understand that her high anxiety levels had a physical basis, which allowed her to feel that she could do something to stop it; she was not just being crazy, silly or neurotic.

To help her find clear and positive cues for her free associative writing, I observed Anita closely but discreetly to detect appropriate contact points as she watched *Elizabethtown*. This had been important in the other free associative work, and I felt it would be especially relevant in Anita's case. She was physically relaxed while watching the movie and laughed openly at many of the funnier scenes. When it ended, she said she had really enjoyed it and felt very well. Immediately after it ended and before discussing it, I asked Anita to fill in the SAI questionnaire again. I corrected this while she answered an open-answer, self-reporting questionnaire. I was both pleased and surprised by her very low SAI value (26/80). Therefore there is an overall reduction of 43 points from TAI to SAI (69: 47: 26) and a 21-point reduction while watching the movie. This showed that Anita had connected positively both with the working method and with *Elizabethtown* as a movie.

In her long answer questionnaire, Anita wrote that she felt better after watching *Elizabethtown* because she enjoyed the story and the style, and because the two principle actors are among her favorites. She also liked the film's main subjects and the way it dealt with these. Claire was her favorite character because of her spontaneity and personality. Her favorite part of the film was the final re-encounter, which made her very happy. The film allowed her to believe that there can be happy endings, even if these only happen in films (*cf.* Ap:204).

After Anita had finished all the questionnaires, we talked about the film and her reactions to it. We talked about her STAI results: both the good news – her lower SAI; and the bad – her high TAI reading. I explained that despite her high biological TAI, her lower SAI readings both before and after watching the movie implied that she was relaxed during our conversation and that she connected very positively with *Elizabethtown*. They also showed that she did not always have to live with high anxiety states. I proposed that writing free associatively to specific scenes might provide her with tools to break anxiety cycles. I presented five scenes/dialogues with which I felt

she had connected. Most of these coincided with her own choices. She selected the following as significant for her:

1. Holly at the memorial ceremony, wondering why she hadn't been funnier before Mitch died, and the line "It takes time to be funny, it takes time to extract joy out of life."
2. Claire to Drew, when he tries to break up with her and she says "There's nothing between us."
3. Claire's words to Drew on the road trip "I want you to get into the deep beautiful melancholy of everything that has happened to you".
4. Anita connected number 3 to Claire's advice on dealing with the shame of the magazine article in which Drew assumes the blame for the fiasco: "Misery: enjoy it, embrace it, discard it." She commented that it was definitely better than his prior alternative - suicide.
5. She also loved the line, "Sadness is easier because it's surrender – I say take time to dance alone," when Drew dances alone yet uninhibited. His emotion shift from the joy of dance to heart-wrenching sobs.

As we were talking, I realized that it was important for Anita to understand that she had a right to be happy. Therefore, I asked her to start her associations by thinking about the phrase "I deserve to be happy." She smiled wryly at the notion, but agreed to start from this perspective. I lent her a copy of *Elizabethtown* so that she could watch it again, or review the scenes with which she had connected. We arranged that she would do her free associative writing over the next week and we would meet the following week to talk about this.

On 26th November 2010 we discussed of Anita's free association to *Elizabethtown*, watching snippets of Clint Eastwood's *Invictus* (2009) and discussion of the movie together with William Earnest Henley's poem (1875). We began by discussing Anita's free associations starting with the first idea "I deserve to be happy." She had produced the following text:

We are drops in an immense ocean, the world will not stop if we disappear, and this means that we have little or no significance. But if we exist, if we have the ability to act, to do things, if we have the gift of life that allows us to take each breath and to feel the soft breeze on our faces and if I can do this day after day, it is because someone wished it so. If I deserved to be born, then I deserve to be alive, I deserve to smile and shout and say that I am happy. (Ap:205)

I was struck by the fact that Anita's text appeared to have an acoustic quality. It started in a whimpering tone, contemplating the immenseness of the ocean and humanity, where one drop/ person more or less does not matter from a communal perspective, but it gains a voice as Anita considers she was born to act, to do, to feel, and ends with a personal triumphal cry, *If I deserved to be born, then I deserve to be alive, I deserve to smile and shout and say that I am happy*. This is an amazing progression for such a short text and offers powerful imagery. More so if it offers a genuine expression of her true beliefs. However, I was a little concerned that it seemed structured and that it had been written and edited as a literary object, rather than as a free associative expression of her feelings.

Therefore, I asked Anita when and how she had written the texts. She explained that she had done them quickly during her lunch break on the day of our meeting, because she had been busy during the week. However, she told me that she had thought about the scenes/lines during the week holding the set phrases/scenes in her mind. When she started to write, she had not thought very deeply about the ideas, just let them flit through her mind as I had taught her and she had written what came into her head. She had just written as the ideas occurred to her and it had been easy to structure these as they flowed into her mind. She found that many of the ideas that had occurred to her during the week flowed as she put pen to paper. She said that writing, in general, had always been easy for her. She might edit and change texts once written, but she did not consciously construct them as they normally started from a central idea that followed a thread of thought. In the case of the texts she gave me, she said she had not even done that. She had handwritten the texts in her notebook and I could see that they had not been corrected or altered.

I asked her what she had been thinking about when she wrote and read the text to "I deserve to be happy" and if she really believed what she had written. She said that now she really believed the text and the idea expressed in: *If I deserve to be born, then I deserve to be alive, I deserve to smile and shout and say that I am happy*, even if she had not believed it before. She added that before I had challenged her about the text, it had been a nebulous thought, but when I asked her if she really believed it she said she knew she did. However, since she had to justify this belief, she told me the story of her kittens. A few months before, Anita's family cat had given birth to eight kittens. Despite the difficulties, Anita persuaded her mother to keep all the kittens. As Anita

cared for them, she got to know each one individually; even though some were very alike, she understood that each one had a unique personality. Unfortunately, when the kittens got older some strayed away from home and did not return, for a variety of reasons: they might have got lost, been adopted by new owners or died. Though she still had lots of kittens, she missed each one that had been lost. Her friends did not understand this, especially as her mother was always adopting strays. But for Anita each kitten she had cared for was different. They were all individuals, and she missed each one when one disappeared from her life. She thought that if each kitten deserved to be alive and happy, then every person – herself included – deserved life and happiness. The image of the kittens reinforced her “newfound” belief that everyone is an individual and deserves to be happy.

We then analyzed her associative criticism to Holly’s line “It takes time to be funny, it takes time to extract joy out of life” also reflected the thoughts expressed in the first association. Anita wrote:

We are all born without knowledge, with nothing. If that’s the case, it is because we have everything we need in this world, we have innate characteristics necessary for survival. We have to search out those little things that make us feel complete and whole. Sometimes, it’s hard to find these things, but if we keep on looking we will find them.(Ap:206)

As we discussed this association, Anita said writing it had opened up important avenues of thought to her. Interestingly, she commented that she really understood the contours of the texts only as we read them together and discussed them. When she wrote them, she felt that they were simple and direct; but as we talked about them she realized that they had layers of meaning for her. The initial scene, her text and our discussion had made her realize that we have to accept ourselves as we are. She had always believed this, but had thought that it would be a natural or automatic occurrence. However, she now realized that it requires time and effort, just like it would have taken Holly time to be funnier when Mitch was alive.

She added that contemporary concepts of productivity lead us to think that this search for self-acceptance is “wasted time” or a “soft option”; it is neither. Rather, it is an investment in ourselves and our futures, and even benefits the people around us. She proposed that we have to accept ourselves for two reasons. First, we belong to families/groups; we must understand and accept our role and importance in these

collective units. Second, we have to appreciate ourselves as unique individuals within these groups, with failings, good points and idiosyncrasies. I felt these writings and discussions were really important. Though, it did not follow the chronological sequences Anita asked to discuss her writing to the scene of Drew dancing alone in the woods and the line, “Sadness is easier because it’s surrender – I say take time to dance alone” next, because of its content:

When we feel defeated it may appear easier to drown ourselves in our tears. This will make other people happy. But if we live the situation and then let it go, either by dancing or thinking it through, if we decide to smile and carry on, not forgetting what happened, but reminding ourselves that it is in our past.(Ap:206)

As we discussed this text, Anita said the two scenes – Holly, and Drew dancing – flowed together in her mind as part of a whole and represented important ideas for her. While we were talking, she commented that Drew’s solitary dance expands on her associations to Holly’s scene. Holly did not take the time to understand herself and her relationship with Mitch until it was too late. She had either taken things for granted or considered them unimportant before. It was only when she was confronted with his absence and needed to understand who she was without Mitch that she took time to appreciate who she had been with him. Anita commented to understand how you work within a group, you have to take time to *dance alone*, like Drew did.

To “I want you to get into the deep beautiful melancholy of everything that has happened to you” Anita wrote an unexpected association that indicates that all her texts revolve around the same themes – a need to take time to acquire acceptance of self, hope, tolerance and a right to life:

Society revolves around stereotypes, patterns and clichés: “pale skin is beautiful”, “singing at the table is rude” and a smile is a synonym for happiness. But these are not always true, sun-kissed skin is also beautiful, there need not be a time or a place for music and many dark souls hide behind bright smiles. We shouldn’t only embrace the good things that happen to us. It is not a shame to cry a little about our sadness’s, we can learn from the lessons life gives us, and they can also be a reason for commemoration. (Ap:206)

This association again speaks to Anita’s appreciation of, and rejoicing in, individuality. When we were together, she added that she thought it was important to show our sadness to others, but we have to be careful; we should not let everyone see it, just those who care about us and will not use it against us. Though all the associations picked up

on different points, there was a surprising harmony between them. They really seemed to build one on another. Could it be said that they were indicating a central unifying identity theme? From a practical perspective, I wondered if this was due to the way she had processed them together in her mind before writing them down during the week. I felt they reached their crescendo with Anita's text to "There is nothing between us":

Human beings are dissatisfied by nature, often looking for what is easy rather than what is right and taking things for granted, they do not give things their due time, they do not think beyond their immediate involvement, thus they may consider themselves in the middle of something that has not yet begun or even existed. It's only when we become aware that this thing we had taken as an assured fact never really existed, that we value that we have lost.(Ap.205-6)

Anita said that thinking about this scene and her association to it made her realize that much time is wasted playing empty social games. Watching the movie, Anita felt that everyone assumes Claire and Drew are a couple. As a viewer Anita did, Drew does; and despite Ben, Claire seems to be quite happy and encourages Drew's attention. Therefore, she says, we are all shocked when Claire pulls the rug out from under our feet and roundly informs us all that "there's nothing between us." Claire lets Drew know that they could have had a relationship, if he had been interested in looking at her as a person. However, he never got beyond the cliché. Because he is totally absorbed in the metaphor and the grand gesture; she is not interested. Claire offers no sympathy for Drew's inability to distinguish between a real tragedy and a charade. Mitch's death had been a real tragedy, but in Claire's mind Drew's fiasco is only a charade. Therefore, there are no soothing sounds when he tells her that he cannot have a relationship with her because he has to kill himself. Instead she tells him to grow up and she challenges him to assume his position as an artist and recognize that his failure is part of that. Later Anita told me that this scene had been a kind of wake up call for her too. It showed her that sometimes we waste opportunities to be happy because we are too self-absorbed, so preoccupied trying to play the right role that we forget to live and enjoy what is happening.

The conversation flowed freely around Anita's texts, and her initially hesitant voice grew powerful and confident as the dialogue progressed. She offered new points as they occurred to her and interrupted my interpretations when I was deviating from her understanding. As she talked, I was increasingly impressed by the connections between associations, reinforcing central themes: the right to be happy; the need to

dedicate time to understanding oneself; the call to “live” and not just play shallow roles. It seemed the free associative writing made Anita conscious of notions she had previously felt, but had been unsure of or unable to articulate. Our dialogue established these ideas in her mind, giving substance to thoughts and beliefs that would become important for her. The associations let Anita realize that she could aspire to happiness. Though our discussion was about connecting with a film, I felt that she was transporting the ideas to real life situations during the conversation.

Then I asked how the week had gone. She said in terms of work it had gone reasonably well, even though she had been very busy with school projects and tests. However, while our talk the previous week had helped her to understand that anxiety was something that builds up inside her physically, and knowing the theory about anxiety was nice when she was in a safe place, she said that this did not help when the panic comes. Once the cycle started, she said she felt she could not stop it. These “attacks” caught her unawares and made her feel that she had few safe havens. Sometimes, she said, she despaired that she would ever feel comfortable in public. I found it hard to associate the confident young discussant, who had just presented her ideas so fluently, to the description of the anxiety now presented.

However, considering how both Anna and I had corrected false thinking patterns using our free associative writing, I felt that Anita’s strong associations with their powerful and personal imagery could help. Anita had seen that the previous week that it is not enough to just say that I will not feel anxious. Her free associations offered alternative thought constructs with strong and authentic images and I wondered if shifting her thinking to these powerful images and thoughts when she felt anxiety beginning would help her break anxiety cycles. After all, she had used physical strategies before, i.e. going to the bathroom in school or her room at home, so she was aware of the anxiety building up. The reduction in Anita’s anxiety levels after watching *Elizabethtown* encouraged me to follow this approach. Therefore, I suggested this idea to Anita, confirming that she could identify the initial stages of an anxiety cycle build up. I also explained that I was suggesting this approach because her very positive STAI reaction to the movie and her powerful texts and imagery showed that this had been relevant for her. I asked Anita, if she thought she could hold onto thoughts and images – like her kittens, Holly, or Drew dancing alone, or the ideas from the texts – when she felt her anxiety build up. However, this would require a sustained effort on her behalf as

Aaron Beck proposes that new thought patterns have to be repeated in order to replace defective cognitions (*cf.* Beck, 1979; 4- 162). She said that she would try and felt that she could because these images generated very strong ideas that made her feel happy. Also, they were genuine to her; they were ideas she authentically believed to be true. We agreed that using her associations to block her anxiety cycles would be her major task for the following week.

However, I wanted to keep the notion of associative writing in her head, so I asked her to write associatively to another scene from *Elizabethtown*, she had connected with: the scene where Drew reads the scathing article in the business magazine to the voiceover: “Misery: enjoy it, embrace it, discard it.” I asked her to write a full free associative text to this scene. I also asked her to write the first four words that came to mind in the scene that followed the one that had been most important for her: the “break up” scene. However, this time I asked her to focus just on the part where Claire expresses her opinion that artists are meant to push the barriers; they are supposed to and they fail sometimes, so the concept of failure should form part of the artist’s reality, ending with the line: “You failed. Do you think I care about that?” As I had been a little concerned about the apparent structuring in her texts, I wanted to see what the 4-word association would yield.

When we were talking Anita told me that one of the things that she was really concerned about was deciding what to do when she finished high school. One part of her really wanted to go to university, she wanted to learn more to be part of the whole academic world. However, the areas that interested her (psychology and journalism) are highly competitive and most people she talked to thought that working in these areas would not suit her, because she is shy and it is difficult to secure appropriate work after graduation. People told her that she would end up working in a supermarket or worse and this made her feel miserable.

Her parents had suggested the officers’ program at the police academy because it offered a structured and challenging career that they felt would suit her. She could also have the option to study psychology later if she chose. Though she was not really interested in this, she found herself submitting to it because it seemed a less challenging alternative. She enjoyed physical exercise and working as part of a team. Also, more importantly from the first day of the program she would know what kind of job she would do when she finished, there would be no uncertainty. This was relatively well-

paid and as an officer she would have a position and status which meant that she would not be on regular patrols. She could opt for a centralized posting and her future would be assured. She would not have to think about it anymore. She argued, going to university does not guarantee appropriate work, so she might as well go to the police academy. However, instead of offering relief, this solution made her feel trapped. The whole thing made her head spin. I saw that this was a major issue, but did not feel that we could do anything about it yet. So, I suggested that we concentrate on one thing at a time. First, we would see if her free associations helped break the build up of anxiety cycles and later we would look at this issue. I asked her to concentrate on the first task, and to try not think about her long term future too much the following week. She agreed to this approach.

I had planned to show Anita another Cameron Crowe film along the lines of *Elizabethtown*, like *Say Anything* (1989) or another film of her choice from the original group screening trials. However our conversation had lasted nearly two hours, so this was not possible. Also, the discussion of her associations had been so positive that I did not want to distract Anita from the themes and ideas discussed. However, I wanted her to leave her with another positive image of how powerfully words can shape lives. I remembered Clint Eastwood's film *Invictus* (2009) both because of its positive message and its numerous references to the inspirational power of literature and music.

The film *Invictus* tells the story of the construction of a "rainbow nation" in post apartheid South Africa brokered at least in part through Nelson Mandela's capacity to understand and use the important symbolism associated with the South African rugby team, the Springboks, during the 1995 Rugby World Cup. It shows the apparently impossible can be achieved when it is believed to be possible. It also refers directly to the inspirational capacity of songs and poems. I hoped the powerful imagery of *Invictus* would help Anita to believe that what might have seemed impossible to her before, could be achievable. Therefore, we watched some clips of *Invictus*. The first is the afternoon tea scene between Mandela (Morgan Freeman) and Francois Pienaar (Matt Damon). In this clip Mandela speaks about the important role Willaim Earnest Henley's poem "Invictus" played in his life: "On Robben Island when things got really bad I found inspiration in a poem, a Victorian poem. Just words, but they helped me to stand when all I wanted to do was to lie down" (Eastwood, 2009). He also speaks about how hearing the future South African national anthem "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" sung at the

Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992 inspired him to go back to South Africa to try to do better, despite the dismal circumstances and Pienaar spoke about the way, he too used songs to motivate his team before a big game. We then cut to scenes of Pienaar (Damon) visiting the former Robben Island prison with his rugby team mates, imagining Mandela as a prisoner, to the background of Freeman reading the poem “Invictus”.

After watching the clips we talked about the scenes and the very difficult political condition of South Africa in 1992 that Mandela referred to. As political commentator and journalist John Carlin states in his book *Invictus: Nelson Mandela and the Game that Made a Nation* (2008) civil war was a very real possibility for South African at that time and Mandela was acutely aware of this possibility. However, despite his best efforts, the negotiation process between the different relevant political parties in South Africa had halted and the future was very uncertain (*cf.* Carlin 2008: 110-118).

We talked about the power of words, how hearing "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" sung by people of different nationalities inspired Mandela to go back to South Africa and to try to do better. History proves that he succeeded. We also talked about Elkie Boehmer's biography of Mandela, *Nelson Mandela: A very short introduction* (2008) which supported the notion that literature had been very important to Mandela. In fact, Boehmer claimed that the poem “Invictus” allowed Mandela to keep going when as his character in the film *Invictus* says all he wanted to do was lie down and die. The words of this poem reminded him that, despite his abysmal circumstances, he was still the author of his destiny, the captain of his soul. In his own biography, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (1995), Mandela writes about how important reading both classical English and Afrikaner literature had been for him, both for inspiration and to gain understand of and insight into his “enemies”, whom he aspired to make friends. According to many commentators, the attitude Mandela inspired among the political prisoners transformed Robben Island from a prison into a “university” (*cf.* Boehmer 2008: 157).

To finish our work together, we downloaded and read the poem “Invictus” together and Anita loved it. We arranged to meet the following week to discuss her free associative writing and to see if inserting the images she had acquired from this would

help her to break her anxiety cycles. The choice of the film *Invictus* had been a good one because Anita watched the whole film during the week.

On 3rd December we continued our discussion of free associative film criticism and viewed the James Runcie's documentary film *J. K. Rowling: J.K. Rowling: A Year in the Life* (2007). We began this work discussing Anita's new free associative writings and her use of previous free associative imagery to interrupt the build-up of anxiety cycles. We then watched Runcie's documentary and we talked about Anita's career choices. We repeated the STAI questionnaires and discussed possible academic alternatives for Anita's future.

Anita told me the week had gone very well. It had been a busy week and she had had to do some tests and to submit a number of assignments between our meetings, but she had not gotten too nervous about them. She said she had tried not to think about what she would do after she left high school, but it still bothered her. We agreed to discuss this after looking at her free associations and Runcie's documentary. She told me that she had actually started to insert thoughts arising from her previous free associations to deal with rising anxiety and this had helped her. The result was not perfect, but she felt a lot better and in some ways it had been easier than she had expected, as the issue was not so much self-control or being strong but shifting the way she thought about things. She also wanted to continue the process as she felt she could do it and that it was helping her. For the first time she felt that she had a weapon she could use to counteract her tendencies to anxiety. She read the poem "Invictus" many times and found it inspirational. She also watched the movie and said she found it was encouraging to see other people use literature to help them overcome their difficulties.

We then examined her new free associative writings. To the line, "Misery: enjoy it, embrace it, discard it," she had written:

We have to live our sadness's, face them, admit them, keep them in a place apart so that they do not affect every moment of our lives. After we enjoy them, embrace them, we must discard them and carry on and see them as a lesson in life. (Ap:207)

Anita's free associative film criticism helped her appreciate that sadness is part of life, and can and should be dealt with it as such. She commented that it helped her realize that while, on the one hand, it is unrealistic to expect a life without sadness, on the other, we should not wallow in this. She said "sadness can help us learn and grow, and we can expect it to generate change in our lives". Then we talked about the association

where I had asked her to write the first four words that came to her mind. To “You failed. Do you think I care about that?” Anita had written: “*A declaration, relief, truth, surprise.*” I had asked Anita to do this “point” association to see what would happen when she did not wrap her thoughts in poetic language. When I asked, she said these four words followed her interpretation of Drew’s on-screen reactions to Claire’s statement. His first reaction is “declaration”, Claire has responded to him, she has made a declaration, so the declaration is followed by relief: “Claire has heard me.” He does not register what she actually said, only that she has heard him. Then he realizes that the “truth” she is telling him is different to what he had expected. This evokes “surprise” (Ap:207).

This point sequence reminded her of her previous association to the line where Claire tells Drew there is nothing between them from the same scene, because both focus on the fact that Drew suddenly realizes that he has not got what he thought he had and that his presumptions have led to him losing the possibility of having it in the future (*cf.* Ap:205-6). She told me that she had not been thinking of the original longer association when she did the word association; she saw the connection only when she had finished. She commented that maybe we are all like Drew at times, taking things for granted, not working at keeping them. Because we do this, we lose them and the striving for perfection can actually mean the death of creativity.

It appeared to me that as Anita was talking about Drew, she was also talking about herself. When we spoke later in June, she admitted that seeing Drew’s ability to change encouraged her to think that she could change too. I felt that the “old” Anita might not have found fault with Drew’s drive for perfection, even if this meant forfeiting all that is important in life (and in his case life itself). Claire’s critique allowed her to see the futility of Drew’s choices and the harm that they inflicted on him and those who loved him. When Drew understood this, he changed his life.

After discussing Anita’s new free associations and her use of the old ones, we watched Runcie’s documentary. Though, I had initially planned to show Anita more movies, as she developed such a strong connection with *Elizabethtown*, I decided to use films that supported the work with *Elizabethtown* and that reinforced the idea that literary connections are important. She also reacted well to *Invictus*. Therefore, I decided to show her James Runcie’s documentary film on J.K. Rowling: *J.K. Rowling: A Year in the Life* (2007). I had a number of reasons. First, this film reinforcement of the

power of literary worlds. Second, Anita had told me she liked the *Harry Potter* series. Third, she loves to write, it is something nature and innate for her and this documentary offers a glimpse into the world of a writer as it accompanies Rowling during the year leading up to the release of the final book in the series. The interviews return to the author's past, they provide strong visual representations of a real life turned about through determination and the production of literature. During the movie Rowling talks about her difficult childhood, her early struggles and how writing has always been liberating for her. She speaks about her struggle with depression and how she drew, what she considered, the most despicable creatures in her books, the Dementors, from this experience. She also makes a poignant visit to the council house where the then unemployed, recently divorced, single mother wrote *Philosopher's Stone* (1997) and "turned her life around" (Runcie, 2007). The documentary is well produced, moving elegantly between interviews on the author's life, the creative process and a presentation of the lifestyle of this world-acclaimed author. Rowling's desire to extract happiness out of life, her honesty and ability to articulate profound feelings simply make the interviews refreshing.

Anita was not familiar with Rowling's story and she had no idea of the problems the author had overcome. She was touched by the depravations and inadequacies Rowling experienced during childhood, her problems in early adult life and her depression and financial struggles as a young divorced mother. She was particularly moved by Rowling's description of her depression as: "a numbness, a coldness, an inability to believe that you will feel happy again, that you could feel lighthearted again, all the color drained out of life really" (Runcie, 2007). Anita was fascinated as Rowling recounted that the Dementors were her personification of this feeling. They enter the series in book three, *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999) and Rowling describes them as:

Dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them [...] Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you. If it can, the Dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself – soulless and evil. You will be left with nothing but the worst experiences of your life. (Rowling; 1999; 140)

At the end of that particular interview with Rowling, Anita turned to me and smiled as she asked and answered the following question: "How do you defeat a Dementor? With powerful personal thoughts, and chocolate!!" After watching the

documentary, we discussed some of its main points. Anita was impressed by the way Rowling overcame her problems and heartened not only by the author's success, but by her apparent happiness and balance despite her public position. Later, in June when we spoke about Anita's work done on her own, she admitted that the image of Harry defeating the Dementors with powerful personal thoughts reinforced the notion that she could defeat her anxiety cycles with the thoughts and imagery her free associative writing had offered her.

I had decided to repeat the STAI questionnaires and felt the lull after the discussion of the documentary was a good opportunity. Her TAI score was 64, SAI 40, so there was a slight reduction in TAI and SAI remained comparatively low. We took a short break, before returning to the issue that Anita really wanted to discuss - what she could do after she finished high school. On the one hand, I did not really want to talk about this topic as it was outside the scope of the project, but on the other hand, I knew that it was very important for Anita and if not discussed might interfere with the development of our work together. Therefore, I decided to approach the issue as I had done with other students who had asked for similar advice. I asked Anita to make three lists. One for the things that she felt she was good at, another for the things that interest her and the last one for things with which she could see herself working. I told her not to think about jobs as such, but ideas. If she would like to work in a team or on her own; if she would like to work with languages or writing; if she would like to be dealing with people or doing research, or working in an office. In just a few minutes, she produced the following lists:

Good At	Interested In	Things you can see yourself do
Art	People	Psychology
Creativity	Messages	The Mind
New Trends	Music	Alternative Medicine
Creative Writing	Dance	Dynamic
Cinema	Teaching	Helping others – nursing
Innovation	Study	Television

I asked her if there was any field where most of these would fit in. When she saw her ideas written down, she said that she could see two areas where most of them fit: psychology or journalism and media studies, more the former than the latter. These were the areas that she had felt “intuitively” interested in, but seeing her lists fit into these areas reassured her. However, she was hesitant about investigating universities

and courses associated with these areas. She did say that she would talk to her parents about the subject. I asked Anita to continue using her free associative writings to help her deal with difficult situations. We agreed to meet again the following week.

When thinking about the activities to pursue with Anita in the next meeting, I was not sure initially how to proceed. When preparing a balance of the work presented, I realized that while watching Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown*, excerpts from Clint Eastwood's *Invictus* and James Runcie's documentary film *J.K. Rowling: A Year in the Life*, we had spoken about all the issues that had been bothering her from her anxiety in general to her specific concerns about her future. The work with the STAI questionnaires had permitted her to gain some genuine insight into her anxiety readings and how these reacted to specific situations. It also helped her understand that she needed to develop personal methods to deal with her high trait anxiety level. However, because these ideas had been discussed with the context of Lichtenstein's unique identity theme; Anita's unique personality traits did not have a particularly negative connotation. I believe Anita did not see her high TAI reading as defective; merely an issue that she would have to deal with practically, just as I had to wear sunglasses in the Portuguese sunshine because of my blue eyes. Her free associative film analysis appeared to have offered her tools to deal with her tendency to develop anxiety cycles and also to have permitted an increased awareness and acceptance of self.

Also, when thinking about our next meeting, I realized that I did not particularly want to show Anita a different movie. The imagery *Elizabethtown* had opened up for her was both powerful and appropriate and I did not want to distract from this. I had obtained the most significant results by continuing my own work with *Elizabethtown* not sidelining the effort to the analysis of other movies. The same had happened with Anna and *Dirty Dancing*. However, I felt that we could not carry on our work legitimately within the context it had begun, if it was not mediated through the filter of films. Moreover, Anita was working well on her own and I did not want her to become dependent on my input. I felt it was time to involve Anita's parents directly in the work with her so that they could help her use the free associative sequences if she felt anxiety cycles build in the future. I had been in touch with them throughout the process and Anita was aware that I had told them about her STAI results. They had been concerned about the high TAI values, but told me that they felt Anita was happier within herself. I also knew that she had talked to her mother about the films we watched and the things

we talked about. However, at this point I wanted them to be fully aware of what we were doing so that they could support Anita in her free associative film analysis and application. Therefore, we all met the following week.

When we met on 8th December Anita told her parents about the films we had seen and how she had written free associatively to these. We talked about Heidegger's definition of anxiety and about what Anita's high trait anxiety meant in real terms explaining why Anita had difficulty "controlling" it. We also talked about Lichtenstein's unique identity theme, and how this suggested that Anita's high TAI readings were not necessarily anybody's fault, just a reflection of her way of being in the world. We also talked about the way Anita had been using her free associative writings to help her break her anxiety cycles. Anita explained that she consciously decided to think of one of the texts when she felt the anxiety start to build up inside herself. She also told her parents that these texts had also allowed her to understand more about herself and not be so self-critical.

She told them that it had been a great relief to her to think that her tendency to anxiety actually had a physical or biological basis. She accepted and liked the notion of a unique identity theme because this meant she had a "right to be different, she was not crazy". Anita's mother asked what she and Anita's father could do to help. I told them said that it was important to counter possible returns to negative/anxious thinking reminding Anita of her positive free associative thoughts. Anita spoke about the texts she had written to "I deserve to be happy" and said that she wanted to continue inserting these thoughts when she felt anxious, because she said that she felt they were working. Her father commented that he was surprised the texts had been so relevant because he had seen how quickly Anita had written them. But she explained that she had been thinking about the scenes all the preceding week and that this itself had helped her to hold a positive image in her head because the film had been strong and powerful for her. She also told him that she had not seen the relevance of the texts until we read them together and she saw how they all revolved around the same topics which were very important for her – that everyone deserves to be happy, but this takes time, effort and courage.

She had all the original texts (I had made copies); though she knew most of them by heart, she said she read them regularly to keep them fresh in her mind. I asked if she would talk to her parents about these so that they could help her if the despondency

returned. She said she had already shown her texts to her mother and they had talked about them.

I told them that I was very pleased with what had happened during our time together, and emphasized that watching films and writing were very important for Anita. I felt that my work as the facilitator of Anita's singular literary experience was finished. With their help she could continue using the techniques we had developed and we would talk again in the future. I lent them some other Cameron Crowe films and Anita's father said he would watch them with her.

We also talked about Anita's interest in going to university after high school and her apparent interest in psychology and media studies. They said that she had spoken to them about this and that they were open to think about it, though they were hesitant because of the difficulties Anita experienced when she moved into a large secondary school. They were concerned how she would react to university life.

After the December meeting with Anita and her parents I stayed in touch from a distance. Anita's mother kept me informed about Anita's progress and said that Anita was much better and happier. She had continued to use the free associative passages to help her deal with anxiety and this appeared to be producing a positive affect because Anita's academic and social performances were improving. Previously, her mother had to pick her up immediately after school; now she often asked to spend free afternoons with friends there. Activities did not have to centre round her; though Anita still liked to bring friends home, she also went out with them or visited their homes. Her teachers had commented on the fact that Anita was happier and more involved in class. Her grades improved and she started to prepare for her future. She did not lock herself in the bathroom at school any more, and her breathing had become much more regular, though she still sometimes had irregularities.

On 21st June I met with Anita's, parents to get their feedback on Anita's involvement in the free associative film analysis project they were very pleased with the outcomes because they said that she was well and happy. They remembered how she used to isolate herself even from them before she did it. She used to go straight to her room when she arrived home; now she stops to talk to them in their workshop first. She also accepts rules and suggestions more easily. Everything had had previously to revolve around her, but now she acted as part of a group. Their friends had even

commented on how she had changed over the previous six months. While before she had often been distant, she now participated keenly in discussions and group activities.

She had started dating and was enjoying a fun and balanced relationship with a boy her own age. She did not have a boyfriend when we worked together, but I knew her parents had worried about previous boyfriends, who had been jealous and possessive, with problems of their own. Her current relationship appeared to be light and fun. Although this boyfriend came to their home, they also went out together socially and Anita went to his home.

Things had also improved academically. While she had failed some subjects during the first round of tests before we worked together, she graduated with a final high school average of 75% and 85% in the national Portuguese examination, which she could use to apply for psychology or media studies degree courses. She was preparing to apply for university and in principle her grades would permit her to study in the areas she had chosen. Her parents accepted this choice because she seemed a lot better and they knew she really wanted to go to university. She had also trained hard physically to enter the police officers' academy, but had been eliminated during the physical trials. Therefore, this was no longer an alternative.

I then met with Anita herself. She was well and happy. She filled in the TAI and SAI questionnaires and scored (52/80) and (30/80) respectively. I was pleased and surprised at the significant decrease in her TAI reading over such a short period of time. I was also happy that her SAI readings remained low under normal circumstances. I had already received evidence that TAI scores can decrease: Anna's final TAI scores obtained the previous week and presented in Chapter Two had offered proof of this but Anna was older and we had worked together in a concerted manner over a longer period. I had not expected such a decrease in Anita's reading so quickly.

While I graded Anita's STAI questionnaires, she completed another feedback questionnaire I had prepared for her and her answers are presented below. I used her answers as the basis for our discussion. I will include all her answers in the analysis, but before looking at them in detail I would like to refer specifically to the ones she developed on in our general discussion. Anita told that she felt much more in charge of her life. She still thought about her texts and realized that they told her a lot about herself. She also felt anxious at times and considered herself a work in progress, but she said her texts helped her to deal with her biology. She did not feel that this was "false"

or that it transmitted an unreal approach to life, because even though she wrote the texts as a reaction to a film, they reflected her inner thoughts. She had had inklings of these thoughts before doing the associations, but they had not been clear ideas. Writing the texts appeared to have given her a tool that helped her unravel her “self” and understand her unique identity theme. She added that our discussions of the texts allowed her to take them more seriously, not just consider them as adolescent daydreams. She really felt that connecting with the scenes from the movie helped her to understand and connect with herself. Also, she understood from our work together that she needed to invest time and effort in this area of her life, that self acceptance would not happen on its own for her, even if it might happen for others. But this was not a problem, just part of the way she is.

She said that *Elizabethtown* had offered her a kind of mirror against which she could verify the appropriateness of her attitudes. Initially, she had selected Claire as her favorite character. However, as she thought about the characters, her texts and herself, she realized that she was more like Drew. She too had a fear of failing and disappointing others. The film showed her that his many sacrifices (a life dedicated to work and potential suicide because of failure) were both unnecessary and disproportionate. The film showed her that perfectionism destroys not only our own lives but the lives of others around us. It also offered her hope – if Drew was able to change, she could too. The new Drew still had the same problems; he just looked at them in a different way. Her answers to questions 2 and 6 refer to this idea.

She also said the *Invictus* clips and J.K Rowling’s interviews showed her that it does not really matter how we start our lives. We can be born into terrible circumstances, as Mandela was; or be unhappy and have problems dealing with life, as was Rowling’s case; but if we decide to fight rather than give in to circumstances, we can achieve happiness. She said that she had read somewhere that metaphors often described life and its crises better than anything else. She remembered Rowling’s description of her depression and classified Dementors as an amazing metaphoric representation of depression. Again she smiled and asked: “And how do you defeat a Dementor? With a powerful personal thought.” She said that, sometimes, when she felt an anxiety cycle beginning she would remember the image of Harry and his wand sending away the Dementors with his strong personal thoughts. This helped her to do

the same to cut the anxiety cycle build up. Her complete answers to the written questions are presented below:

Question	Answer
1. Over 6 months after finishing the initial film project which took place in Nov and Dec of 2010, do you feel it has influenced your outlook or habits?	I think that we are all made of the books we read and the films we see. Therefore, the message that each one transmits to us stays with us every day of our lives throughout our whole lives, though we may not be aware of this.
2. Did thinking about and discussing <i>Elizabethtown</i> , the principal movie in the project, make you feel more comfortable about who you are?	Films are portraits of reality and every character is a representation of someone. Therefore it is normal and natural that we identify with some characters in films. Consequently, if we see films as a reflection of ourselves on the screen, by observing someone who is not us, we can understand better why we do certain things. This way we can also “break ourselves down” and find our “self” and this way understand who we really are.
3. Did the notion of a unique identity theme help you feel more comfortable about yourself?	We have all faced the identity crisis, in the search and effort to find our “me.” This notion of identity theme helped me understand that we can be happy, even being “unique” and accept my differences.
4. Did the notion of a unique identity theme help you feel more confident that you could be happy in the future?	Yes. In my opinion the way we can find happiness is discovering ourselves; understanding ourselves; knowing who we are; deciphering our identity and accepting our true “self”.
5. Did knowing you had high trait anxiety help you to deal with situations that normally generate stress?	Knowing what our “problems” and “failings” are is the first step to knowing how to deal with them. So, yes this helped me develop methodologies and strategies that allowed me to manage my anxiety in these situations.
6. Did thinking about the scenes that you connected with help you deal with these situations?	Those models of personalities that we identify with in films can [sometimes] influence the way we act; can lead us to expect that we will obtain certain reactions to the way we act.
7. What were the most positive aspects of the program for you?	It helped me to understand and accept my biology better and to accept “my failings”; my anxiety. It also helped me to understand the importance of being unique. This encountering of our personality allows us to find happiness.
8. Did the project have any negative influences in your life?	Absolutely not. The project had very positive and enriching influences on my life.

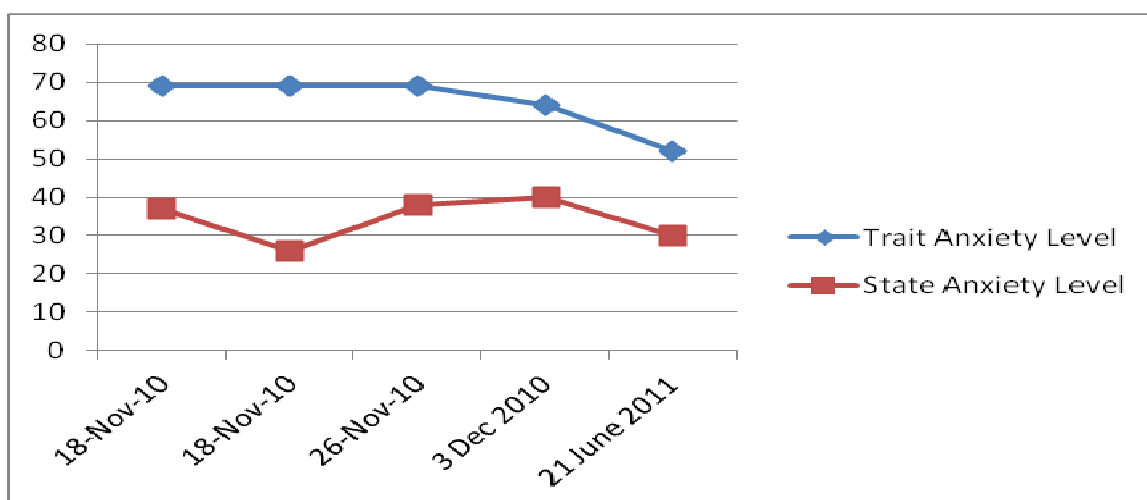
9. Could it have been presented/performed in a better way?	In my opinion the process and methodology were the most appropriate and they were very well carried out.
10. Were the follow up sessions which took place in December enough?	This was appropriate for the type of work.

(Ap: 208-9)

Knowing that we all have a unique identity theme, a way of being in the world was a great release for Anita. She also said that sometimes when we feel different, we see parallels of our self on screen and we do not feel so alone. The method requires thinking about things that can be difficult and introspection that is not easy, but working with films makes it easier both because it offered positive models and a means to pursue internal issues.

Anita said that she continued to use her free associative film criticism to interrupt anxiety cycle build up. Her progress throughout was quite spectacular. Her initial score (69, 37, 26) was very surprising. First for the very high 69 point TAI score and second, for the difference between TAI and SAI readings before she watched *Elizabethtown*. Anita's TAI result belied a serious situation. However, her lower SAI before encouraged me, because it indicated that she was relaxed about working with films and doing free associative film analysis. Also, the further reduction registered during the course of the *Elizabethtown* screening and her longer answers, which will be presented later, showed that she really connected with that movie. In fact the lowest SAI score (26) of the whole trial was registered after Anita watched *Elizabethtown*. She registered a massive 43 point reduction from TAI to SAI after during the course of this initial screening. Because of the way the work developed *Elizabethtown* was the only full movie we watched together. Even so her SAI scores never registered a value about 40.

Graph 9 Development of Anita’s STAI readings from Nov 2010 to June 2011



As the graph and table show her SAI scores were always markedly lower than her TAI score. The TAI score remained relatively stable while we worked together actively dropping by only 5 points. But as this questionnaire is designed to measure long term attitudes, I think this is quite an appropriate result as we only worked actively together over a short period. However, while Anita worked alone for a six-month period from mid-December 2010 to mid-June 2011, not only did her SAI results remain stable and low, there was also a further 12-point drop in TAI. Therefore, there is an overall 17-point decrease in Anita’s TAI readings over a seven month period. This is indeed a very positive evolution in a very short space of time.

Table 1 Details associated with alterations in Anita’s STAI readings from Nov 2010 to June 2011

Trait Results		State Results	
Date	Value	Event	Value
18 Nov 2010	69	Before watching <i>Elizabethtown</i>	37
18 th Nov 2010		After watching <i>Elizabethtown</i>	26
26 th Nov 2010		After discussing reaction to <i>Elizabethtown</i> and watching & discussing snippets from <i>Invictus</i>	38
3 rd December 2010	64	After discussing work done and watching film on J.K. Rowling	40
21 st June 2011	52	Feedback questionnaire. Anita had worked on her own with the “techniques” we developed.	30

When Anita repeated the TAI questionnaire on 21st June it stood at a medium level (52/80). It was gratifying to see that throughout the whole period her SAI remained significantly lower than her TAI. Even when it fluctuated, the SAI score always remained within the “low anxiety”. In our final June Anita wrote that learning the film analysis techniques had enabled her to develop methods and strategies to deal with situations that are normally difficult for her. However, she noted wryly that she was still “a work in progress”. Her SAI value of 30/80 at our final meeting was also very encouraging because we did no “fun” activity that day, just a feedback session.

Meeting *Elizabethtown*, Anita met herself. Following the free associative film analysis and observing changes in STAI results, she learned not only to understand, but also to accept her unique way of being in the world. She also developed coping skills to deal with circumstances that normally provoked high levels of anxiety, maintained a moderate level of state anxiety in regular circumstances and obtained a marked reduction in trait anxiety. The notion that every individual has a unique way of interacting with the world, derived from a unique identity theme as conceptualized by Heinz Lichtenstein, became a very important idea for Anita. Extending this proposal to suggest that there is no such thing as a good or bad identity theme was also very relevant to the work. This idea, together with her free associative sequences allowed Anita to think that every individual, herself included, could aspire to happiness by accepting and understanding their identity theme. Moreover, she was released from a series of internal conflicts by comprehending that her identity theme was not her fault, but that it was derived from biology and early care; this helped her to be kinder to herself and removed ideas that she was acting immaturely, being stupid, unrealistic, or ungrateful. The STAI tests provided relevant empirical data, because the results showed how specific situations affected Anita’s state anxiety readings and demonstrated improvements in trait results. I think working through the medium of film was very important for Anita, because it offered both a mirror and a buffer. It allowed her to begin to look inside herself, while at the same time also permitted her to develop new coping skills, ways of dealing with real problems in her life.

At the time of the writing of this thesis, Anita had become a psychology undergraduate, studying in a reputable university in Portugal. She is really enjoying the experience and has even enrolled in extra research electives. She has long days and it is hard work, but she is taking pleasure in the whole experience. She is thinking about going on the

Erasmus program as she would like to study abroad also. Her course is a five-year integrated Masters degree course and she, and at this time she is thinking of specializing in clinical practice in her fourth year.

4.3 Individual work with Alana

Alana was forty-five years old when we worked together in 2010. She was married with two young children. She has an international career in a governmental organization, and has been living and working in Portugal as a foreign posting for a number of years. I met her professionally in March 2010 and we talked about my work with film casually. She was interested in free associative film analysis because she has an unusual reaction to sad films. Whenever she watched a very sad movie, she not only cried but also experienced severe pain in her right hand. She had always wondered and enquired why this happened but had never received a plausible answer.

As I was interested in learning if strong personal emotional connections with films affect viewers physically because of Antonio Damasio's somatic marker theory, with Alana's cooperation I set out to research the roots of this unusual reaction. We talked over the next couple of months to try to establish when Alana first experienced this sensation. However it was not easy for her to identify this. Initially she thought that this reaction was part of her innate personality, as she always remembered feeling this way when watching sad movies. After consideration, she traced the first incidence back to watching a sad film when she was very young. She was not sure what age she was but it was certainly before she started primary school, so before she was six years old. She had been watching an afternoon matinee one weekend, when her mother and siblings left home to do other things. She wanted to watch the rest of the film as she was enjoying it, so she asked to stay at home alone. She was not afraid, because her family was near and it had been her choice to see the rest of the film. However, as the movie progressed, she found the story so sad that it upset her deeply. She cried profusely and clinched her hand so much that it hurt her. As an adult she understood that her reaction to the movie must have been very extreme because she remembered her mother's concern when she found Alana transfixed in front of the screen, crying copiously.

Once Alana remembered this situation, the story of the movie came flooding back to her and she was able to describe it in detail. She remembered it as a black and white film (she did not know if this was the original format or just the TV she watched it on) about two single mothers who at the beginning of the movie are presented as having financial problems. One is white, the other is black. The white woman becomes a movie star with the help of the black woman who takes care of both their children and

is a perfect mother to them. However, the black mother is rejected by her own nearly white child because she is black. We quickly realized that she was talking about Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959). I explained free associative film criticism to Alana adding that it often showed us elements of our unique identity theme when carried out with films that meet us. Her reaction to *Imitation of Life*, obviously indicated that it met her. I asked her if she would be willing to watch the film again with me and to analyze her connection with it free associatively. She agreed to try this. She was a little concerned because she felt it might be a harrowing experience, but she did want to know more about her connection to the movie and the reason for her reaction.

As the storyline of this movie is relevant to the analysis, I will include a short plot summary and review of its critique. Today Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959) is recognized as a classic, exploring family, career and race relations in America of the 1950s. However, initially many critics decried it as a soap opera style film. It tells the story of two very different poverty-ridden, husbandless, and nearly homeless women and how they fulfilled their dreams together. Beautiful white Lora (Lana Turner) becomes a star of the stage. With Lora's money, homely black Annie (Juanita Moore) creates a comfortable, loving home for her daughter, Sarah Jane, and all who need her care and succor – including Lora and her daughter Susie.

Despite apparently following a standard melodramatic theme, the film is actually quite provocative. Casting credits place white Lora with her glittering lifestyle and glamorous wardrobe as the star of the movie. However, when the movie is viewed today, notwithstanding Turner's noteworthy performance, it is recognized that she is surpassed by Moore because of the versatility and authenticity of the character she plays. On the one hand, Annie is the traditional Negro nanny who understands that society has cast her and her daughter in a different role, despite the lightness of Sarah Jane's skin. However, while viewers know that Lora is a widow, explaining the circumstances of Susie's birth, Annie simply identifies herself as Mrs. Johnson and states that Sarah Jane's father was nearly white and left before she was born. She makes no excuses for her unusual motherhood and is proud of her black heritage educating Sarah Jane as a black child, despite the lightness of her skin.

There is no self pity in Annie's life, which she chooses to live generously and open heartedly, despite strong indications that Sarah Jane's rejects her heritage and condition. This is demonstrated from the beginning with Sarah Jane's anger at sleeping

in the back, her rejection of a black doll, her pretending to be white at school. This continues as she grows and pretends to be white with boys and rejects respectable jobs that would indicate her black heritage to become a “white” dancer in various questionable clubs. Despite, her disappointment, Annie understands her daughter’s plight in school, and when she realizes Sarah Jane will never settle down as a respectable black girl, she tries to reconcile with her and prepare Sarah Jane for her impending death. Thus Annie refuses to fit into a traditional model of recrimination and retribution. She dies physically exhausted from a life of caring for others and with a broken heart because of her daughter’s rejection and choice of lifestyle. However, the film does not end at her death but, with Annie’s triumph, her ceremonial funeral and the tearful return of the prodigal daughter begging for forgiveness.

Due to her busy professional schedule and young family, the screening took place in Alana’s home (from about 9.30 p.m. to 1.00 a.m.) on the night of 14th/15th December 2010 after a normal working day and putting her children to sleep. Alana had not had time to sit down and write the introductory associative text about why she connected with the film. However, I remembered how just thinking about the significant passages in *Elizabethtown* had helped Anita write very efficient free associative texts. Therefore, in preparation for the screening I had asked Alana to think about the film and her connections to it during the week before we would watch it together and we began the session talking about her thoughts and recollections.

Alana told me she had watched *Imitation of Life* more than once, but she had not seen it for a long time. However, as she had thought about it during the week, two very strong memories came to her mind. The first was that, in her opinion, the film symbolized a mother’s perfect love for her daughter; the second, the pain of rejection. As we spoke together, Alana wondered aloud if she had connected with *Imitation of Life* because she wanted to feel the unconditional love of a mother. As a middle child in a large family, she had often felt that she was not really loved or approved by her mother, no matter what she did. As an adult, she understood that her mother’s reactions were due to practical limitations as well as her own upbringing. However, Alana wondered if she had unconsciously connected with what her childish mind saw as a perfect symbol of maternal love and that the movie upset her so much because it also offered a strong visual representation of the rejection of this.

I think Alana's conversation offers another example of how discussing a film can allow people to think and talk about personal issues quite openly and freely. First, *Imitation of Life* offered Alana a visual model that she connected with and allowed her to pursue personal thoughts. Second, pursuing her connections to the movie involved introspection on her own life. Third, connecting the film and the life facilitated a process of recognition that allowed Alana understand some of her attitudes and trace the roots of some thinking patterns. Thinking about and discussing connections with the film in this manner permitted contemplation of personal issues. I asked Alana if her hand hurt when there were scenes of rejection in other films and she answered affirmatively. I asked her what upset her most when she watched scenes with rejection. She answered simply that she felt it was wrong and unfair.

Then, I spoke in more detail about Lichtenstein's unique identity theme theory and his proposal that we all have a personal and individual way of dealing with the world acquired from our biology and early care. I suggested that her reaction to these scenes might be a reflection of her unique identity theme. Alana has worked her whole adult life in the criminal justice system and I wondered if this might be another expression of her need to see justice done and a reflection of her unique identity theme. However, we did not discuss these issues deeply, as I did not want to slant the viewing or her free associative writing. I just wanted her to understand that her reactions to this type of film could be related to her unique identity theme and that her free associative analysis could show her more about this. I also alerted for the kind of visceral reaction that indicate that we connect with particular scenes free associatively to prime her to start the viewing from an active position. She said in her case that this should be easy as she recurrently felt very upset, cried and her hand ached when seeing scenes of rejection.

I had decided to ask Alana to do both STAI and free associative writing tasks: STAI in order to see if her SAI would increase after watching a movie that upset her, as had happened to some volunteers on trial 7 and free associative writing to understand her connection with the movie. I explained anxiety according to Heidegger's model and established the distinction between state and trait anxieties using Spielberger's instructions before she filled in the SAI and TAI questionnaires.

I also showed her excerpts from *Elizabethtown* and demonstrated how I had written free associatively to the movie and explained how Holland interpreted free

associative film criticism through Lichtenstein's concept of unique identity theme. Then we watched *Imitation of Life* together to identify the connection points for free associative film analysis, as I had done with Aida, Anna, Anita and the individual volunteers on trial 5. Alana was curious to see whether her hand would ache, knowing that we would be looking for a reaction. However, despite the fact that she was being "observed", she had the same reactions as when she was watching a movie with family or friends. She felt upset, cried and her hand ached, so it was easy to pick sections for her free association.

There were four particular scenes:

1. A beach scene at the beginning. A child (later we discover that she is Annie's daughter, Sarah Jane) cries to her mommy that she is tired too.
2. When Annie brings Sarah Jane's boots to school and Sarah Jane tries to hide to avoid being identified as a colored child.
3. When Annie visits a club where Sarah Jane is passing as a white dancer, Annie pretends to be Sarah Jane's old nanny so as not to expose her daughter. Despite denying her mother to her friends, Sarah Jane mouths "Mama" to Annie as Annie leaves. Annie does not see this.
4. Annie's funeral.

As we watched the movie together in Alana's home, the atmosphere was very informal. Alana made quite a few comments because she had not seen the film for a long time and it was truly like encountering an old friend. I noted her comments and will present the original comments and our discussion because her reactions at the screening were quite different from her later free associative writing. Though I tried not to interfere with the flow of the movie, there were a few occasions where I felt I had to respond because some original comments were very polarized. Curiously her later free associative analysis was more complete and developed along a theme progressively.

In the beach scene when Sarah Jane cries because she is tired and knows that she and Annie have no home to rest in, Alana was very sympathetic towards Sarah Jane initially. She thought it was very sad that a child might be homeless. However, as the movie progressed, her attitude changed. When Lora takes Annie and Sarah Jane back to her apartment and Sarah Jane rejects Susie's offer of a black doll and complains about sleeping in the back, Alana said, "No I've changed my mind, I'm not sorry for her, she's just a brat. I'm sorry for Annie." She said this with quite a vengeance, reflecting a

polarization of position. I thought that it was important for Alana to consider that extenuating circumstances might be responsible for the child's attitudes. So I asked, "But in some ways don't you think her reaction is understandable, even if it's not nice? As a child isn't she justified in thinking that she can expect what other children have?" Alana thought about this and said, "Maybe, but she (Sarah Jane) is still not nice, still not grateful."

In Scene 2, Sarah Jane tries to pretend that she is not Annie's daughter in school. Alana was crying at this scene and her hand was really hurting her. Seeing that she was in a state of real pain and distress, I said to her "Remember it's just a film," and when she said this to herself the pain lessened considerably, though it did not go away. She was very angry with Sarah Jane initially during this scene, but her attitude softened later when Annie cries not because of her child's rejection, but because she knows that Sarah Jane will always be hurt due to the color of her skin. Annie's acceptance of Sarah Jane's rejection made it easier for Alana to accept this too. However her anger with Sarah Jane returned in the other two chosen scenes and it was only slightly attenuated by Sarah Jane's sorrow at the end.

I asked Alana to write point-free associative texts to the scenes selected, rather than full texts, for two reasons. First, I wanted to see if the point-making free associative procedure, begun at the end of Anita's trials, would work efficiently on its own or if it was preferable for viewers always to write narrative passages. Second, I had been concerned that Alana would not have the time to write longer narrative free associative analysis texts as she is normally very busy. She was going to have a little time shortly after the screening, but then would return to a hectic schedule. I considered that under her circumstances the note-making form might be easier and more practical because it is a more directed method. I was concerned that, if Alana's free associative criticism was distanced from the screening, she would not have the time or the conditions to pursue the free associative links.

However, before she started this I told her about her STAI results, which were (35, 26, 29). All readings were in the low anxiety range. Considering the order of her TAI result, her state anxiety level dropped significantly at the prospect of watching a movie, even when this happened late at night after a long days' work and putting her children to bed. Her SAI-after indicated a stable low state anxiety score (29). Thus, even though watching *Imitation of Life* had been difficult for her and she promised ironically

that she would not watch a sad movie for a while; it did not appear to affect her state anxiety significantly. When I told her STAI values, she was pleased and actually asked to read her SAI-before answers. She made this unusual request because she said she had filled in the STAI questionnaires quickly, intuitively as I had instructed and she wanted to see her spontaneous answers because she had been troubled of late. At the time, her husband had recently begun to work in another European country so she was living alone in Portugal with her children without a network of family or close friends. She felt the weight of being solely responsible for her young dependent children. She worried if anything happened to her at work that there would be no one to care for them. She had even had a panic attack not long before and though she had rationalized the fear, her panic reaction still bothered her as this had never happened previously.

Reading her STAI answers comforted her because she felt that they showed a spontaneous open and positive response to unknown questions. She commented that she recognized herself in those answers and was pleased to see that what she called her “operating mode” was still positively constructed, despite her recent feelings of panic. She thought as long as she could maintain this attitude, things would work out for them as a family. This was an unexpected detour, but it again showed how confirmation offered by the STAI questionnaires can be helpful. I wondered if the four circumstances I had observed Alana’s reaction to *Imitation of Life*, the story she recounted, the stability of Alana’s STAI results and her reaction to her STAI answers were four manifestations of a central identity theme. Alana appears to feel external events intensely and genuinely, but she also has a highly functional and apparently positive way of interacting with the world, which functions well regardless of transitory feelings. Perhaps, this is also the reason why her SAI results were so stable during the screening despite her strong physical and emotional reactions to the movie.

Alana sent me her free associations by email on 17th December 2010. Her covering note contained two relevant points. The first recalled an unusual childhood memory and the other refers to how watching “sad” movies had a very real effect on her state of spirit, even if her SAI results remained stable. Two days after watching *Imitation of Life*, Alana still wrote:

I just remembered when I was out for a run, when I was young I used to wish I was black. Perhaps because of this movie, I don’t know!!! ,

Only comedies for the rest of the year!! (Ap:212)

Her free associations were written in a very organized and orderly fashion, as can be seen below:

Scene 1: Beach Scene at the beginning when the child says she is tired too

Thoughts

- *Unfairness of it*
- *It's so unjust*
- *The world is not right*
- *The mother is so honourable , trying to protect the child and keeping a smile on her face in the midst of the destitution, even though she herself must be scared*
- *The world should have a warm and safe place for everyone*
- *She's just a child*

Scene 2: When Annie (mother) brings boots to school and Sarah Jane (child) is trying to hide

Thoughts

- *Shame and panic of the child wanting to be something she is not*
- *Panic / SICKNESS AT BEING EXPOSED*
- *Poor darling kind loyal shameless Annie is blind to the shame of her child and should always be protected from seeing it.*
- *Annie does not deserve that kind of treatment*
- *Other people do not matter*
- *Both should love each other and Sarah Jane should adore being the object of such love*
- *The pride of Annie and the smile on her face is so precious*

Scene 3: Turned away from her friend, Sarah Jane mouths "Mama" to Annie as she leaves.

Thoughts

- *Desperation and destitution. Feeling ill in the stomach at such desolation but of Annie or more Sarah Jane*
- *Annie braves it*
- *Sarah Jane is so mean but trapped*
- *So wrong and so unfair to Mama*
- *Sarah Jane really is trapped as she knows in her heart how precious Mama is and always was*
- *The shame she feels is such a shame*
- *Being who you are and being comfortable with who you are is so important*
- *Annie is oh so kind but that kindness cannot be returned to her by her daughter*
- *Annie is pure goodness*
- *Sarah Jane is wasted by her life*

Scene 4: Funeral

Thoughts

- *Justice is served on Sarah Jane by the world*
- *This justice is also cruel*
- *This is not what Annie would want*
- *Need to forgive Sarah Jane and Sarah Jane needs to be forgiven*
- *Grace (Ap: 212-3)*

Reviewing Alana's free associations, I was struck immediately by the beauty of the flow of words, the depth of expression and the fact that they seemed to dovetail into each other in an orderly progression. They moved from unfairness and injustice to forgiveness and grace. There is another common pattern in the final three associations; they begin with a bald negative recognition of something Alana feels is wrong or unfair but, by the end of her string, she has found a justification for this. The first is similar but slightly different because the character does not confrontation the sequence of the flow of thought. The first associative sequences reflect on the "unfairness" and "injustice" of Annie and Sarah Jane's homeless condition, especially as the mother is so honorable and Sarah Jane is "just a child". There is no condemnation of Sarah Jane here, just a reflection of the injustice of the world.

The second sequence begins with Sarah Jane's shame, panic and SICKNESS AT BEING EXPOSED. I was surprised at this beginning because, when we watched the movie, Alana had been very scathing of Sarah Jane in this scene. However, her association begins with empathy for the child. This string also idealizes Annie as the perfect, too good for this world mother, whom Alana wants to protect from the shame of rejection but it also recognizes that Annie could have acted differently and made things easier for Sarah Jane. "*Poor darling kind loyal shameless Annie is blind to the shame of her child and should always be protected from seeing it.*" Thus it initiates a path of acceptance for Sarah Jane, understanding her panic and shame. In the end Alana cries, why can they not just be allowed to love each other, why does their love have to be tainted by social convention, especially as *The pride of Annie and the smile on her face is so precious*. So though she does not want to see Annie hurt, Alana has made room to understand why Sarah Jane may have done what she did and she shifts the blame for the rejection from Sarah Jane to a society that would encourage the child to act in this way robbing her of the ability to receive her mother's love.

In scene three, Alana begins the sequence with "*Desperation and destitution. Feeling ill in the stomach at such desolation but of Annie or more Sarah Jane.*" Now Alana's feeling of desolation has passed to Sarah Jane. Curiously, Alana's reaction is physical (*feeling ill to the stomach*) as well as emotional. She considers Annie noble and brave, but attributes Sarah Jane's meanness to her feeling trapped by who she is which does not allow her to return her mother's love or live a decent life.

Scene four is the culmination of the story: all of Sarah Jane's rejections of her mother are returned to her as she rushes to her mother's coffin, but it is too late to say she is sorry. Alana's association begins by gloating a little, writing "*Justice is served on Sarah Jane by the world*". However, she quickly realizes that this justice is cruel and that her heroine Annie would not have sought it. Then she writes two extraordinary lines: "*Need to forgive Sarah Jane and Sarah Jane needs to be forgiven,*" followed by a single word "*Grace.*" I had to ask Alana what she meant by the last two statements, so I sent her the following email on 21st December 2010:

I was really struck by one thing in your reactions - you seem to have made peace with Sarah Jane. When you wrote at the end, "need to forgive Sarah Jane and Sarah Jane needs to be forgiven," were you thinking of yourself, that you need to forgive her or that the other characters in the film need to forgive her? Also, I would like to know what you mean by grace. (Ap:214)

She answered the same day writing: “Looking at your comments, I think it was I who needed

to forgive Sarah Jane and the GRACE comment, I am not certain as the train of thought” (Ap:214).

Unfortunately, I was not able to meet with Alana for over a year after she did these free associations. Looking at her associations and our brief interchange afterwards I had been struck by the aesthetic beauty of their construction and their ending with forgiveness (Alana’s of Sarah Jane), which led to grace – a term she had not been able to define. I contacted her again in June 2012 to see if the free associative film criticism had had lasting effects. I met with Alana on 19th June 2012 to discuss any continued influences of the free associative film analysis project. I asked Alana some questions. First I enquired if the free association project had helped her. Alana answered, not really. She explained that she had watched Tate Taylor’s *The Help* (2011) during the summer and her experience had been the same. She was upset by the movie, she cried profusely and her hand ached. However, as she talked about the experience she realized that it had been easier to watch a film like *The Help* than it usually is and she “recovered” from the experience more quickly. While she was watching the movie, she reminded herself that she was just watching a movie her hand had not hurt as much, just as had happened when we watched *Imitation of Life* together. She had not done that before and knowing that it worked was a positive result of our experiment. She also reflected that the post viewing experience was a lot less traumatic than usual- Thinking that the film bothered her because it tapped into her natural sense of justice meant that she did not feel guilty about her reaction or dwell excessively on it, even if she had a headache from crying. It had been easier to rationalize her reaction afterwards. Thus, she concluded that perhaps things were a little bit better.

I had been fascinated by the fact that she had wished to be black as a child. I asked her if she could think of any reason for this. She said, she really did not know where this idea had come from. As a child, she had always thought that black people were lovely and she had loved her black doll. However, she did not have any real contact with black people then, she only saw black people on American movies. Maybe, she suggested, she had seen Annie as the ideal mother but, to be able to love her she would have to be black too. This was just an idea that had occurred to her at the time,

she did not know if that would be the case. She just knew that she wanted to be black in a completely white community where no black people lived.

I had always been struck by the beauty, flow and coherence of her free associations, as they passed apparently seamlessly from unfairness and injustice to forgiveness and grace. Therefore, I asked her to reread them and tell me what she thought of them a year after writing them. She read them quickly and in a matter of fact manner stated that she felt they summed her up. They reminded her of what she feels is her innate way of looking at life. She explained that when she sees things that are bad she first needs to recognize what is wrong and state this clearly, then look for the silver lining. She always has a gut reaction to injustice but looking for the silver lining alleviates this.

I asked her if this meant that sadness was her natural state and she answered no, she feels that she has a positive attitude towards life in general and this buoys her up. When she is affected by external events, she needs to verbalize what she feels is wrong to be able move out of it. She reacts to sadness and injustice, especially in real situations but also to a lesser extent to onscreen events. However, she always looks for the silver lining and she thinks this means that she can have compassion and a positive proactive attitude. She gave some examples, which illustrated that she felt tremendous empathy for real life events that touched her own life. We finished our talk returning to her last association “*Need to forgive Sarah Jane and Sarah Jane needs to be forgiven / Grace*”. I was still captivated by this phrasing and so I asked her what she thought about this a year later. She answered simply “why, after forgiveness we can enter a state of grace”, and when I asked what grace is; she replied “peace, an absence of strife.”

This work with Alana was very curious. The free associative writing did follow clear patterns that illustrated a common unique identity theme, and one Alana recognized immediately when she read her texts eighteen months after writing them. The STAI results and her reaction to her answers on these questionnaires seemed to support the identity theme pattern too. However, though the writing identified a pattern and Alana’s acceptance of this helped her rationalize her reactions and diminished the effect watching sad films had on her, it did not remove the physical reactions. The point-making free associative film analysis seemed to work quite well in identifying identity traits in Alana’s case. It offered the same kind of coherence that had appeared in the single point film free association sequence that Anita had done. Therefore, perhaps

it too could be a valid method. However, though it brought insight into unique identity theme, this writing did not permit change as Anna's and my longer written associations (to the returned shoes scene in *Elizabethtown*) had done. I wondered if full free associative texts would have uncovered the underlying reasons behind the aching hand and eliminated these. This remains a question, but I was not sorry I had instructed Alana to do the point-making free associative film criticism because I really do not think she would have had the time or availability to do the longer form.

The work with Alana also highlighted another aspect of this free associative film criticism. Though viewers may follow standard patterns in this analysis, one never knows what outcomes to expect, as the process involves pursuing the unique connections between viewer and movie. Therefore, it produces an open ended story; the movie offers paths to pursue, but the paths chosen depend on the unique connections between mind and movie.

However, in all the cases of free associative film analysis, whether the open analysis followed by Aida, Anna and I or the more structured forms followed by Anita and Alana, the outcomes were always positive and productive. Free associative film criticism applied in this manner, allowed volunteers to increase awareness and acceptance of self. Also, depending on the application, to correct erroneous thinking and habit patterns; it demonstrates significant advantages and illuminating as to how contact with films may be beneficial today. Extending the positive experience of watching a movie that connects intimately with viewers beyond the viewing experience, I consider that they may indeed represent one of the possible alternative paradigms that films can offer viewers.

Conclusions

At the start of this work, I set out to learn more about how watching movies could influence viewers' at the time of screening, and in the long term. Psychoanalytical literary critic Norman Holland had proposed that books and films could become transitional and transformational objects, with the capacity to offer insight into readers' and viewers' unique identity themes and practical projects like Robert Waxler's CLTL and Jay Winsten's social marketing program had demonstrated how relevant contact with fictional narratives can influence readers' and viewers' attitudes and change lifestyle choices. However, very little work had been done in practical terms, to quantify how reflective contact with fictional narratives might influence readers' and viewers' minds and lives. Therefore, I cast a broad net of enquiry in an attempt to obtain quantitative data indicative of general tendencies to inform as to how deep contact with fictional narratives might influence lives and minds.

Since I wanted to produce techniques that maintain the enjoyment and uniqueness of the movie viewing experience, while at the same time enhance its positive aspects, I used a variety of methods ranging from individual free associative film analysis to group screenings accompanied by a variety of questionnaires. Unfortunately, the time and resource limitations associated with a PhD thesis and the fact that I chose to supplement STAI questionnaires with longer questionnaires meant that I was not able to work with groups large enough to produce controlled and standardized data that could offer definite results. However, because these questions had not ever really been raised in this manner before, this could never have been my objective. My aim was to make an initial enquiry that could indicate concrete research orientations to be pursued outside of the scope of this PhD project.

The results obtained throughout the practical work exceeded all my initial expectations and for that reason, as the work progressed, I felt encouraged to extend the field of enquiry. My role changed throughout the course of the project also. In Chapter Two, I performed or facilitated free associative film analysis. In Chapter Three, by analyzing STAI and open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires respectively, I recorded the spontaneous and reflective results obtained when volunteers watched different types of movies. As the work progressed, the outcomes from initial trials spawned new projects and the trials described in Chapter Four were a combination and culmination of all methods used previously. I assumed a more active role in this final work as I used

the movie watching experience actively to help volunteers learn how to deal with specific problems, whether these were high state or trait anxiety levels or aching hands.

Film trials ranged from single screenings lasting just three hours to free associative projects extending over two years. All offered concrete evidence that watching films transmitting hopeful and constructive ideas is a positive activity, especially when the trials encouraged volunteers to reflect on the significance of their connections with the films viewed. Improvements recorded ranged from reductions in state anxiety levels, enhanced coping skills and increased awareness and acceptance of self.

Reductions in anxiety levels were registered by STAI questionnaires completed after single screenings. Newly acquired coping skills were recorded when reviewing the answers to open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires. The latter also demonstrated that reductions in anxiety levels were not always synonymous with enhancing coping skills, which introduced new considerations, as when I set out on this project, I had anticipated these to reflect directly one on the other. Volunteers' free associative film analysis demonstrated that this tool not only permitted viewers an increased awareness and acceptance of self, but also allowed them to develop personalized coping strategies to overcome individual problems and construct a more self-assured attitude when planning future activities. Thus trials produced empirical data and narrative accounts indicating how contact with fictional narratives might influence readers' and viewers' lives both during the immediate period of contact and in the longer term, as had been my first initial research objective.

When developing operational methods I had sought to produce free flowing procedures so that watching a movie on the film trials would be very similar to pursuing this experience autonomously for relaxation. While activities pursued were always structured, the formats used did not appear to detract from the common movie watching experience. In fact, volunteers' comments indicated that the methods enhanced the film viewing activity and made the whole procedure more personal, rewarding, and in some cases even more enjoyable. I documented all the methods carefully. Therefore, in principle, these can be used repeatedly in home and school environments, satisfying my second initial objective.

While some conclusions were drawn at the end of each chapter, in this final section I will analyze the aggregate outcomes from the different trials to identify

common trends in light of the scientific and literary theories that formed the academic framework of this work. I used Holland's theoretical models both to develop a conceptual framework and to help me interpret results obtained in an ongoing manner. However, when contemplating the results of my practical work en bloc, I realized that some outcomes supported Holland's models while others offered divergent suggestions. My results demonstrated different levels of contact between movies and viewers as Holland had proposed. However, some found parallels with Holland's suggestions in *Literature and the Brain*, but others divergences.

In *Literature and the Brain*, Holland suggests three different levels of interaction. He considers that the first level of interaction between readers, viewers and fictional narratives is "automatic" relaxation because readers and viewers have learned to anticipate passively obtained pleasure from this activity. They know that they will not be required to produce an active response to the scenarios that they will be presented with. In Holland's model, the second level of contact generates enjoyment as readers and viewers make sense of the fictional narrative within the context of their own lives. The third offers an expansion of the total living experience as readers and viewers hover over texts and extract significant meaning from these.

While reading Holland's work, I had considered that all these interactions imply varying degrees of conscious recognition. However, I came to a slightly different conclusion when I reviewed the results of the group screening trials. It seemed that films and viewers interact mutually at different levels and *do* different things to each other at these levels, but perhaps not all these interactions occur at the level of consciousness. Also, when I analyzed the results in light of the scientific and literary theories presented in Chapter One, it appeared that different mechanisms might produce distinct outcomes.

Plainly viewers process films through their own biological/biochemical/autobiographic selves as Holland suggests, but during my trials I noticed that the films themselves seemed to *do* or facilitate reactions in viewers. I consider that the STAI questionnaires demonstrate a primal, unconscious reaction to the movie watching experience because volunteers did not always appear to be aware at a conscious level of the anxiety reductions registered. Some volunteers, who registered significant reductions or increases (*Good* screening) in anxiety levels while watching the movie, wrote they felt the same after this. Others wrote they felt better, even renewed, despite

the fact that they registered minimal changes in anxiety levels. Therefore, relaxation and feeling better after watching a movie appear to be produced by different systems.

STAI results also showed that the experience began before the movie was even viewed because the mere idea of sitting down to watch a film normally resulted in a considerable reduction from trait to state anxiety. The fact that volunteers' anxiety states generally reacted positively to the mere idea of sitting down to watch a movie indicates a positive physical predispositional response (perhaps caused by positive somatic markers) to the movie watching experience. This finding would appear to indicate that while individuals are aware of the consequences of the activation of these somatic markers because these are felt physically in the body, their activation occurs at an unconscious level. If this is the case, viewers process or *do* films initially at a primary, automatic, unconscious level. Subsequently still at an unconscious level, films *do* something to the viewer and this interaction is reflected in initial changes in state anxiety readings. If a body "remembers" that it has obtained an optimal level of biological homeostasis through watching a certain kind of movie, it might encourage the organism to repeat the experience. This might explain why teenage girls experienced such a large reduction in SAI values in anticipation of watching a movie. This is probably a pleasurable leisure activity in which they frequently indulge. Perhaps their older counterparts did not react in the same way because they do not have the same habit or expectation. This idea was further supported by the fact that SAI-before readings were generally lower on the second screening of the double trials. Though three trials are not enough to make absolute claims, the outcome observed is indicative of a constant positive feed-forward effect.

Curiously, unless there were extenuating circumstances, the initial reduction in state anxiety levels on anticipation of watching a movie was more constant and generalized across groups than the state anxiety responses to watching the films themselves. The latter was normally more individual with a significant degree of variance in groups. This had been an unexpected response.

Also, some viewers were not aware of their bodily responses, indicating that, at least in some cases, this is an unconscious reaction. However, general trends were observed. When a film transmitting encouraging and uplifting ideas was screened, reductions in state anxiety levels continued generally. The double trials demonstrated that this effect was repeated when two similar movies were screened. However, initial

reductions in state anxiety levels were reversed when volunteers watched *Good*, an emotionally challenging film. The significant increases in SAI readings registered at the end of the *Good* screening and the variance observed on other screenings showed that continued relaxation and reduction in state anxiety depended on the type of film watched.

The outcome from the *Good* screening and Spielberg's original calibration experiments with short films showing simulations of workplace accidents in sawmills contradicted a commonly held belief that the movie going experience is relaxing, independent of the type of film viewed. These results indicate that, at a bodily level, the movie viewing experience may not always be a relaxing one and watching an emotionally challenging film or one with physical onscreen violence might have the opposite effect.

Holland suggests that the first level of contact with literature resulting in relaxation occurred at a reactionary level because readers expect to obtain pleasure without having to take action, so they consciously "turn off" action responses and anticipate relaxation. Thus, readers and viewers relax while engaging with fictional narratives because these permit them to partake in events and adventures outside their usual living experience without expecting action. However, the results of the STAI questionnaires seem to indicate that viewers relax even before they tap into the rational systems, which would be responsible for turning off action responses, since some did not seem to be aware of reductions in anxiety levels. Also, the type of biological relaxation registered during the viewing period appears to depend on the type of film viewed. Watching *Good* returned most volunteers' SAI-after readings to TAI levels or higher. Therefore, though it shares characteristics with it, the type of relaxation described by Holland does not appear to be identical to the reductions in state anxiety levels that may occur while viewing a film as registered by the STAI questionnaires.

By their nature, the open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires forced volunteers to think about the film they watched and their connections with it. These questionnaires encouraged an interaction with the fictional narrative similar to Holland's second level. When volunteers completed this questionnaire carefully, they analyzed their interaction with the film according to their own personal living experience. Except for the *Good* screening, volunteers normally wrote that they felt the same or better after watching the movie. There were generally three responses. Some wrote that they felt the same after

watching the movie even when they registered significant reductions in SAI. Others wrote that they felt better because they were aware that they had relaxed while watching the movie. Still others wrote that they felt better (sometimes with minimal changes in SAI) because they felt that they had acquired new ideas and perspectives that had given them new strategies and coping skills.

Volunteers who wrote that they felt the same but still enjoyed watching the movie and experienced reductions in state anxiety readings generally justified this emotional stagnation, because they consider watching a movie cannot change anything in their lives. Perhaps, for this reason, they either ignored or were unaware of changes in their bodily states. Holland attributes relaxation to the fact that readers and viewers know that they will not be expected to act. Perhaps feeling the same after watching a movie is due to the fact that viewers not only know they will not have to act, they do not expect the film to act in their lives. Whatever the reason it was clear that, these volunteers did not seem to be aware of their bodily relaxation. The same was also true for volunteers on the *Good* screening. Some experienced significant increases in anxiety levels during the screening but wrote that they felt the same after watching the movie. They justified this response by writing that they already knew about the issues presented, or that they were aware that they had merely been watching a film.

Volunteers ascribed feeling better to two causes, relaxation or new ideas acquired from the films. I considered that, when volunteers ascribed feeling better to relaxation, they were merely recognizing the reduction in state anxiety registered by the STAI questionnaires at a conscious level and verbalizing this. I wondered if this could be seen as a good example of Holland's relaxation. However, less than one third of the volunteers who watched a film with positive outcomes recognized this type of relaxation at a conscious level, even if reductions in anxiety states occurred automatically as the STAI results indicated. The answers of the volunteers who wrote that they felt better or more hopeful after watching the movie because it transmitted new perspectives and novel ways of looking at personal issues, even serious personal problems, seemed to offer examples of the second level of interaction that Holland proposed: enjoyment because of making sense of the film in terms of their own lives. Curiously, while most of the volunteers who ascribed feeling better to relaxation registered significant reductions in anxiety levels, volunteers who wrote they felt better because of new ideas (could they be called potential coping skills) did not always

register these reductions. Moreover, volunteers' answers in the latter group also suggested that maintaining the ideas absorbed from the movie should allow the development of improved coping skills in the long term.

The idea that contact with films can change viewers' world views, if they are willing for this to happen, was further supported by the volunteers' responses on the *Good* screening. Independent of increases in state anxiety levels, volunteers only felt worse after watching this film, when it transmitted ideas to them that upset their way of seeing the world. However, despite these answers, state anxiety levels increased generally. From these varying results, it can be suggested that when viewers processed the film at this conscious level, it appeared to *do* different things for a variety of reasons, which might extend from individual biological systems, to expectations resulting from past experiences, and viewers' real living experiences at the time of viewing.

Antonio Damasio has written extensively on the role of the body proper in "educating" the mind through different mechanisms, including somatic markers and ascribed biological homeostasis, as one of the fundamental drives of living beings. As already discussed, somatic markers, the visceral or non-visceral physical expressions stored in the body, are one of the mechanisms that mediate the integration of body/mind/environment. Damasio's somatic marker theory and his proposal that people are addicted to moving images on screens because these imitate primordial nonverbal cellular narrative, made me wonder if the apparent "addiction" today to reductionist fictional narratives presented in moving picture format, like soap operas, might not be based on the fact that "intuitively" people's bodies know the aforementioned will not raise state anxiety levels automatically, in the same way that watching challenging fiction might, thus interfering with cellular homeostasis.

Most people are aware of Damasio's proposal that these somatic markers can warn the individual of potentially dangerous or threatening situations. However, he also suggests that these markers can encourage the body to perform tasks that will be potentially beneficial, even if these involve activities (such as physical exercise or study) that may be physically unpleasant at the time, but that offer rewards in the future (*cf.* Damasio 2006: 170-185). These ideas lead me to wonder if thinking about the physical effect of particular types of fictional narratives on the body could actually be important when planning film (or literature) programs and relevant for their success.

When talking to volunteers on the *Good* screening after they had completed all the questionnaires, many commented that upon reflection, they had enjoyed the movie, even if it had not been a fun film like *Elizabethtown*. Some even recognized that they had enjoyed *Good* more because, in comparison, *Elizabethtown* seemed to be a little frivolous. These volunteers' answers "contradicted" the STAI results and even the answers on longer questionnaires. I wondered if this reflection and debate on personal connection with the movie had helped volunteers overcome negative SAI reactions. I questioned what would have happened if volunteers repeated the SAI questionnaires a third time after completing their longer answer questionnaires and discussing the project. Would their values reduce? Of course I cannot offer answers to these questions, but they made me query the importance of including sections in film (and literary) programs which encourage reflection and discussion of how readers and viewers are influenced personally by the fictional narratives studied, alongside debate according to theoretical or academic criteria. I felt that this debate might allow readers to process negative physical reactions to texts, if these occurred, and lead them beyond unconscious negative reactions which resulted in unconscious increased state anxiety levels.

The scientific community has finally embraced the concept that body and brain influence each other mutually, and are of equal importance to the ordering and functioning of the whole organism. Damasio's proposals in *Descartes' Error* support these ideas: "the body provides a ground reference for the mind. [...] When we see, or hear, or touch, or taste, or smell, body proper *and* brain participate in the interaction with the environment" (Damasio 2006: 223- 4). In *Self Comes to Mind* (2010), Damasio describes the human organism with the "living" body as the central locus, and discusses how brain patterns are laid down to perform activities as a response to the organism's need to live a physically regulated life:

The living body is the central locus. Life regulation is the need and the motivation. Brain mapping [assigning of body functions to brain areas] is the enabler, the engine that transforms plain regulation into minded regulation and, eventually, into consciously minded regulation. (Damasio 2010: 107)

However, in literary circles, the body is not exalted in this fashion and minds are regarded as the primary guardians of truth. I argue that studies on fictional narratives would benefit from considering a physical dimension of the reception process.

Psychotherapy has embraced the idea that bodily memories, even if fewer and less refined, are more faithful recorders of past events than the myriad linked neural paths of the mind. Publications like Babette Rothschild's *The Body Remembers* (2003), and Robert Scaer's *The Body Bears the Burden: Trauma, Dissociation and Disease* (2007) are just two of the many works which explore physical bodily memories and how unraveling these can help patients come to terms with past traumas and assist recovery.

Curiously, the idea that cerebral memories may not be the most faithful is not new. In the nineteenth century Sigmund Freud proposed that memories of past events are not absolute but constructed. When writing to Wilhelm Fleiss, as recorded in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fleiss* (Masson 2007), Freud proposed that people's memories of their past are based on their state of mind at the time of recalling the memory. Thus, if one is happy at the time a past event is recalled, this is likely to be remembered as a happy one. Freud proposed that our memories are produced as "a *rearrangement* in accordance with fresh circumstances – to a *retranscription*" (Masson 2007: 207). This notion is now scientifically supported as Levin demonstrates in *Psyche and Brain: The Biology of Talking Cures* (2003).

These ideas made me wonder even more if the automatic, reactionary increase in state anxiety levels registered on the *Good* screening might trigger negative somatic marker organization. It made me think that film and literary programs discussing complex or controversial topics should take into consideration the fact that bodily mechanisms may lead readers and viewers to desire to avoid these fictional narratives, as these may lead to immediate cellular imbalance. Therefore, instruments that allow debate and discussion should be included in these programs to encourage viewers to overcome this initial physical barrier and set up and establish positive somatic markers for this kind of contemplative thought. Also, perhaps texts presenting more challenging ideas could be interspersed with lighter literature of escape texts.

Reflecting on these ideas in general, I thought the old maximum "it is all a question of balance" appropriate. There are times when reduction in state anxiety level and subsequent relaxation at a cellular level that results from watching a funny soap may play a vital bodily role. However, this type of contact with fictional narratives will not construct a new future, in the way that reflective reading of relevant literature on the CLTL program did. Anna's and some of my own free associative film criticisms were not pleasant at first. Some CLTL participants' descriptions of their initial reactions to

literary works demonstrate that they did not feel comfortable initially either. However, the programs offered sufficient encouragement so that participants continued with them until they received rewards. In the case of free associative analysis, the paths pursued led to the deconstruction of psychological barriers and the ability to move onto new futures. Holland's proposals imply that most readers and viewers should be able to form significant interaction with most fictional narratives on at least these first two levels. This appeared to be true because independent of outcome, many volunteers on group screenings wrote about how the films viewed made sense within the context of their own lives, even those who merely relaxed and felt better for this reason.

However, on my group film screenings, only volunteers who watched *Elizabethtown* wrote that they acquired new coping skills from this film. None of the nearly 50 volunteers who watched *Chocolate* or the 5 who watched *Say Anything* attributed feeling better after watching these movies to ideas they had taken from the film. Initially I thought this might have been due to the circumstances of the *Chocolate* on trial 3. However, as the double screenings progressed and no volunteer on the second screening of either *Chocolate* or *Say Anything* ascribed feeling better to new ideas offered by these movies, I began to wonder if all films had the capacity to offer mechanisms to obtain new coping skills, at least within the context of the type of contact that the group screenings offered.

I was particularly inclined to think along these lines because volunteers on the *Say Anything* screening really tried to relate to this film in terms of their real lives, even identifying personally with specific characters as A4 did with Diane. Still, those who wrote they felt better indicated that this happened because they enjoyed films with happy endings or, love stories, or for other such reasons. There were no indications of new coping skills – just relaxation or observation. So enjoyment, in the sense of making sense of a fictional narrative within the context of one's own life, is not necessarily synonymous with new coping skills.

Therefore, I began to wonder if there was something in the narrative structure of *Elizabethtown* that permitted the acquisition of new coping skills. Many volunteers had written significantly about *Elizabethtown*, whether in free associative film criticism or open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires. On the other hand, the texts resulting from free associative film criticism, independent of the film used, were always relevant and indicated new or enhanced coping skills. This led me to consider that different types of

contact with fictional narratives could permit different levels of contact between viewers and films. Aida wrote very significant free associative criticism passages to *Pay It Forward*, Anna did the same to *Dirty Dancing*, and Alana's point association to *Imitation of Life* was also important. The free associative film criticism carried out during the course of this project was a highly individual process resulting in singular outcomes for each volunteer. This process permitted increased awareness and acceptance of self. In cases, such as my free associative analysis of the first scenes of *Elizabethtown* and Anna's analysis of *Dirty Dancing*, it also allowed us to recognize where certain aspects of our unique identity themes could cause problems and helped us develop new thinking and habit patterns, which definitively led to improved coping skills.

In some ways free associative film criticism seemed to work in two directions. It always permitted a construction towards the future based on an awareness of unique identity theme, but in some cases it also allowed a return to the past and an uncovering of psychological issues. The free associative film analysis that unearthed psychological barriers was not easy to perform, but the notion that identity themes were not volunteers' constructs, thus not their fault, eliminated blame. Also, the notion that anyone can be happy if they know how they interact naturally with the world and take this into consideration when making important decisions, encouraged volunteers to persist when the process became difficult. In practical terms, Lichtenstein's unique identity theme theory offered reassurance and encouragement to persist with free associative film criticism when this became difficult.

The fact that volunteers were analyzing and discussing their interactions with movies and were not expected to speak about themselves facilitated the whole process. If issues became personal, the retreat back to the discussion of the film was always available. Also, at times, the film seemed to act as a mirror, and also a playing field where volunteers could try to understand the roots of feelings and emotions and experiment with new thinking. In application, this form of free associative analysis was not a passive tool. It was not saying "Because I am like this, I cannot do something." Rather it assumed a dimension something like "if I want to do something, I need to try to do it this way because I am like this." Volunteers exhibited a real feeling of accomplishment when they did something that they would not normally attempt or counteracted a "natural" negative tendency. Free associative film criticism helped

volunteers identify and discard harmful habits because it offered another powerful perspective that seemed to take the following form: “I need to be aware of certain personal obstacles arising from my mind and the way I learned to interact with the world.”

What were the differences of the results obtained from the free associative writing and the open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires? Looking at my own, Aida’s, Anna’s, Anita’s and Alana’s writings, it can be seen that we all *met* ourselves. The writings demonstrate an increased awareness and acceptance of self. However, this was not a blanket effect following the same path and achieving the same results in each case. The free associative film analysis permitted Aida and me (in the road trip free associative string) to appreciate and maintain appropriate lifestyle choices. Later in the blended work it allowed Anita to begin this process. This construction of future plans based on deep personal awareness did not appear to happen without free associative film criticism. Volunteers, who connected with new ideas on the group screenings, latched onto that idea as they formed a synergy with this intuitively, but they did not seem to understand the connection. Answering the longer answer questionnaire helped them to understand why they connected with the film, but even in situations like A3’s where very significant results were obtained from simply watching *Elizabethtown*, the improvement was more due to new insight into her circumstances.

Conversely, by following our free associative strings Anna, Anita, Alana and I (initial scenes) gained awareness of unique identity theme and an understanding of why we had previously insisted in acting in certain ways from time to time, even when these were not advantageous for us. Free associative film criticism offered a very powerful tool. Not only did it alert us to behaviors that could be destructive; it also assisted in the development of appropriate coping strategies that counter negative influences without losing the advantages of the identity trait. Anna continues to work hard and is organized and diligent in endeavors, but she now takes times to enjoy life and is not so afraid of the introspection that can come from quiet times. I continue to evaluate the suitability of my performance, but this is now a much quicker and more objective procedure, no longer implicating self worth. We both learned that we have an inclination to obsession when it comes to these traits and so are watchful for excesses. Alana also grew to understand why her hand aches when she watches sad movies. It is true that in some ways the free associative analysis did not change much in Alana’s case, but it did bring

understanding and acceptance; I think this alone is worthwhile. This type of awareness did not occur on the group screenings.

Still there were many significant responses to *Elizabethtown* on the group screenings. Not least was B4, who experienced a mere 2-point drop in anxiety, but wrote he felt renewed after watching *Elizabethtown*. A7 also connected significantly with *Elizabethtown* and experienced a 20-point drop in SAI while watching the movie. She wrote that she felt better after watching this movie because it made her think that she could live open-heartedly. Watching *Say Anything* did not have the same effect because she thought it was just another love story, fun to watch but not life changing. A3's SAI-before (registering at 70 points) dropped to less than half the original value while she watched this film. Her long answers and later interviews showed that thinking about *Elizabethtown* and transferring ideas she learned from it into her real life permitted her to develop new coping skills in the long term. However, it was her free associative analysis to *Howl's Moving Castle* that allowed her to look inside herself. Therefore, perhaps it can be said that volunteers on group screenings *did not meet themselves* on these trials because they did not do free associative film criticism. However, those who embraced new ideas and concepts from the films they watched found a new approach to certain aspects of their lives and these acted as transitional and transformational objects in their lives.

However, when the outcomes of the group trials are compared to the results obtained from free associative film criticism, it can be seen that the latter always produced significant results independent of the film viewed, while in the case of the former the results obtained seemed to depend on the film viewed. Reviewing free associative texts, I realized another interesting point about Anna's, Alana's and my own free associative film criticism to problematic issues. After performing this task we were able to read the films without distorting them with the lens of our own concerns (or perhaps defense mechanisms as Holland would propose). I not only recognized a personal trait, but could again watch the opening scenes of *Elizabethtown* without emotional distress. Anna corrected misconstructions of characters and roles. Alana could look at Sarah Jane from a different angle. Prior to doing free associative film analysis, we had misread or had very polarized readings of these scenes/characters. As the "movies happened in us" our interpretations of initial viewings without free associative analysis were tainted by our past experiences, free associative analysis

stripped this away and allowed us to read the movies more simply and directly. This demonstrated that free associative criticism does not reduce the importance of the original text. Instead it becomes evident that free associative writing actually liberates the original text from being misinterpreted because of the weight of viewers' past living experiences. This correction did not occur during the STAI trials, even when volunteers wrote significant texts.

Another question was if there was a difference between Anita's free associative writing to a film that had been selected for her and that produced by other volunteers who had worked with films they had chosen free associatively themselves. I had deliberately selected *Elizabethtown* as it had yielded positive results in the group screenings. Despite the fact that she had not chosen *Elizabethtown*, Anita enjoyed watching it and connected with many scenes positively. Like Aida she had no negative link to the movie, she analyzed free associatively and the writing process appeared easy. Anita wrote significant texts on a weekly basis to scenes with which she connected. Her free associative writing did not change her interpretation of scenes or characters. It just appeared to deepen the experience, especially as she discussed these texts. Anita herself referred to the fact that she felt her self-awareness process had begun with her texts and the discussion of these. Her free associative writing also really helped the outward movement of adopting new and more appropriate habit patterns. Anita's connections were always light and easy, documenting reactions to watching the films. They offered new solutions and new perspectives without a reflection on negative internal issues. In fact Anita's writings reminded me of my free associations to Drew on the road trip. My connection to the road trip scenes was much freer and easier than to the returned shoes scene. Thinking about the scenes brought hope of new beginnings, new thinking and in general a feeling of lightness as I embraced new ideas or encountered things that were important to me.

However, if the free associative writing process had been easy for Anita, our final interview indicated that application of the results may have sometimes caused her problems. Her comments, like being a work in progress reminded me of Anna's difficulties with free associative writing to *Dirty Dancing*. However, it must be emphasized that both Anna and Anita continued with the process because they anticipated potential benefits and working through films made the process more manageable. Also, free associative film criticism that reverting back to mistakes like the

returned shoes scenes, led to changes in thinking and habit patterns, but was physically and emotionally quite difficult to perform. I do not know if this would have been possible outside the context of Heinz Lichtenstein's theory of unique identity theme; the acceptance of self and aspiration for happiness that this transmits were vital for progress. Therefore, perhaps we can conclude that "corrective" free associative analysis is not easy to perform, but it is advantageous because it shows where identity themes have not been understood and led to bad decisions or feelings of inadequacy and blame. Recounting the story of Mr. L in *The Brain that Changes Itself* (2007) Norman Doidge illustrates how free association can permit the construction of thought threads that may unravel problematic issues from the individual's past. The free associative process led Mr. L back to the events that triggered his problematic behavior, something he had not been able to do prior to using the method because these were hidden deep in his unconscious. Free association permitted Mr. L to understand the roots of his problems, reconcile himself with these and move on to construct a better future (cf. Doidge, 2007; 225-241). Therefore, it is possible to propose that free associative film analysis may allow viewers to return to their past, by understanding why and how they connected with a film.

Alternatively, the lighter, more outward progression that occurs when an idea or a notion seen in a movie connects with viewers and their way of being in the world does not appear to require this inward motion. However, this progression may be more sustainable when anchored in the viewers' own past successful living experience and the free associative film analysis method assists this. On reflection, I realized that I always felt light-hearted and happy when I watched the road trip scenes, even before I free associated to them. However, before the free association, I forgot the scenes and my reactions to them shortly after viewing. After free associating to these scenes, I retained the memory longer and I merely need to think about the scenes for the lightness to return. The feeling was not connected to viewing the film, but my recollections of how they spoke to things that were important for me. Also, because of the group screenings and individual work, I must have watched *Elizabethtown* at least twenty times while I was doing the trials. However, no matter how many times I watched it, I still enjoyed it and felt lighthearted afterwards for an extended period. The association gave me a strong image that was easier to retain and also build into daily routines and regular thinking systems.

The overall process in Anita's trial added extra components including the theoretical discussion of anxiety inherited from trial five. Also, my instruction to Anita to use her free associative texts to break her anxiety cycles followed from my observation of the way A3 deliberately decided to focus on her positive connections with *Elizabethtown* to overcome her problems. Anita followed very clear instructions and responded to very specific scenes or ideas. Thus, her application of the free associative texts was more focused and directed. Still despite these differences, Anita appeared to reap similar benefits from her work as other free associative film volunteers who chose their own films, especially when one considers that all the free associative film analysis trials shared similarities and differences. Also, even if Anita's writing had been easy and implied moving in an outward in-between, her application of this required her to look inside herself.

Looking at free associative film analysis in this way, it definitely appeared to have a two-fold flow: one an inward motion permitting self-awareness and acceptance and the other progressing outward and facilitating the development of new and more appropriate thought and habit patterns. The second could also happen when viewers connect with ideas transmitted in films, as happened, in some cases with the open-answer, self-reporting questionnaires on the *Elizabethtown* group screenings; but in this case the new idea may not be so personal. When I reread *Meeting Movies* (2006a), I saw traces of these two spaces/movements. Below Holland refers both to the inward journey in meeting a movie and the extension of the total living experience that this offers:

I think of it as "meeting" movies or books or poems. Just as, when I meet a new person, my whole self and history faces them, when I meet a movie, my whole self gets into the picture. As someone has remarked, that screen spread out in front of us in the darkened theatre with the audience shuffling and snuffling around us is really a layer of our own cortex. To meet a movie is to meet oneself, and that is what I am inviting you to do. (Holland 2006a 14)

As I reviewed the work with volunteers on different trials I considered the inward progression to be exclusively connected to free associative film analysis. This permits increased awareness and acceptance of self and appears to work well when viewers do the associations to scenes that they have connected with intimately and chosen free associatively, independent of whether the film itself was their free associative choice or not. The second, outward, movement appears to happen when viewers *meet* relevant ideas and concepts in films and try to transfer this to their real

living experience. It occurred on the free associative trials and also with volunteers on the group trials like A3, A7, B4, F39 and many others, as their longer answers revealed. The discussion of film, anxiety, personal and collective narrative development and all the themes that were added to the group trials assisted volunteers to consider pursuing this development because these debates highlighted the potential benefits of allowing oneself to connect with ideas transmitted in movies.

A3 offers a good illustration of how the two functions might work separately and distinctly. *Elizabethtown* offered A3 a bridge to embrace new ideas and new concepts and to develop new coping skills which were vital for her at the time of viewing. However, meeting Sophie – the character she associated with in *Howl's Moving Castle* - allowed her to accept and appreciate herself. Her free association also allowed her to change her reading of Sophie and so change her expectations for her own future. The work with Alana offered another interesting point. This showed that free associative criticism can help viewers understand why they act as they do, but it might not allow them to change deep-rooted attitudes. Tracing the source of her aching hand to her initial viewing of *Imitation of Life* as a child allowed her to understand the reaction. Her free associative criticism also helped her to see that she has a very strong sense of social justice and inherently reacts very strongly to injustice especially when perpetrated because of race. This comprehension brought awareness and acceptance, even if her hand still hurts when she watches sad movies. Her free associative film criticism allowed her to understand herself better and accept her attitudes. It helped her to soften the intensity of her reaction to watching sad movies and ended unexpectedly with “grace”.

The idea of a constructive “in-between space” offered by the arts is not new. D.W. Winnicott dedicated the majority of his life’s work to understanding how interaction with external objects during play influences the development of the child and later the adult. He also suggested that creative experiences, leading to the production or appreciation of the arts, take place in a “potential space” between inner and outer worlds. In general, psychoanalysts regard play, creativity and the arts as part of good mental functioning, and play is considered critical for the organization of maturing minds. But there appear to be two spaces. One, like that visualized by Winnicott, allows the individual to understand the relationship between self and external objects, “self and

non-self". The other, in Lichtenstein and Holland's opinion, allows one to return to the formation of character:

In such a space we recapture our earlier half-emerging relationship with a mother. Literature therefore helps us live better, in Winnicott's view, because it allows us to loosen boundaries: between self and non-self; inner and outer; past, present and future; or using and enjoying (Kant's "disinterestedness"). The arts help us to go back to a time when we were not so rigidly compartmented into our working and playing and loving selves" (Holland 2009 329 -330)

Though Holland generally follows a neuropsychanalytical approach in *Literature and the Brain*, the latter part of the above text refers to his belief that contact with literature (especially through free associative literary criticism) can return the reader to the stage of construction of their unique identity theme when "we were not so rigidly compartmented". Returning the individual to the construction of this irreversible theme can permit an acute awareness of self and also acceptance. Knowledge of the theme can allow for the correct selection of important life choices as Lichtenstein proposed. Thus, there may be two in-between spaces. One "activated" by free associative film or literary criticism can return the individual to the mood of identity theme and recapture "earlier half-relationship with a mother" and as such is a space of internal investigation. The other is an apparently more external one, loosening of boundaries between "self and non-self; inner and outer; past, present and future," where significant contact with a film or a book can act as a transitional and transformational object, whether through free associative analysis or any other form of significant reflection.

But can these different in-between spaces exist? Damasio's models presented in *The Feeling of What Happens* (2000), especially his interpretation of progression from proto to core self and "interposed structures" as components of neural architecture offer a scientific model compatible with the first. His representation of "dispositional representations" and the transfer from core to autobiographical self permit possibilities for the second.

When discussing neural architecture in his earlier publication *Descartes' Error*, Damasio refers to studies demonstrating that sensory receptors do not speak to each other or to motor controls directly (cf. 2006: 90-96). Instead, each level of early sensory areas has to speak to a variety of interposed association regions in the cerebral cortex. These in turn speak to other interposed regions further along, and the process is continued and repeated. These interactions are mediated physically by forward

projected axons that work as feed-forward projections that converge farther down the neural stream. However, neural streams do not terminate at apex points in the brain. In fact, they never “terminate” because of feedback loops:

For one thing, they never ‘terminate’ as such, because, from the vicinity of each point to which they project forward, there is a reciprocal projection backwards. It is appropriate to say that signals in the stream move both forward and backward. Instead of a forward moving stream, one finds loops of feedforward and feedback projections which can cause a perpetual recurrence.

Another reason why the streams do not ‘terminate’ in the proper sense is that out of some of their stations, especially those that are forward placed, there are direct projections to motor controls.

Thus communication among input sectors and between input and output sectors is not direct but intermediate, and it uses a complex architecture of interconnected neuron assemblies. (Damasio 2006: 93)

The result of all this neural activity is the assembly of “interposed” structures that both momentarily construct and stealthily manipulate the images produced in our minds. Damasio proposes that, physically, we interpret the signals introduced at the early sensory cortexes not from a neutral position, but through the assembly of “interposed” structures. Despite the number and complexity of neural structures located between input and output sectors, incoming messages are organized as categories and concepts. The assembly of “interposed” structures offers an interpretive framework that explains how individuals make sense of what they see, hear, feel etc. Damasio proposes that as strategies for reasoning and decision making are acquired through individual interpretive frameworks, people react differently to the same situation due to their total living experience (*cf.* 94).

It could be considered that the feedback and feed-forward loops inherent in these interposed structures cause them to maintain a certain harmony throughout life once they have been initially established, and they could form the physical framework of a unique identity theme concept. Damasio’s model of progression to different forms of self and the construction of consciousness make use of the interposed structures theory. In *The Feeling of What Happens – Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness*, Damasio presents his model of proto, core and autobiographical self as well as his

representations of levels of consciousness. In Damasio's model, proto-self¹ is the initial or basal level of self. Core self is the product of modifications caused in proto-self as a result of contact with external objects. The records of the contacts are stored as second-order non-verbal neural accounts. The "biological essence of the core self is the representation in a second-order map of the proto-self being modified" (Damasio 2000: 175).

In Damasio's model, the core self is triggered by any and all external objects, therefore it is continuously generated. However, because its core interpretative framework – personally assembled interposed structures – is laid down during early development, it is relatively stable over time, undergoing only minimal changes over a lifetime. Damasio's concept of core-self produced through interposed structures offers an interpretative framework that could explain unique identity theme theory. Perhaps this could be explained neurobiologically as a derivative of "interposed" neural structures produced from second-order non-verbal neural accounts of the interaction between the self and the external object in early childhood and so finds parallels with core self. Following the theories it can be proposed that both are constructed due to inherent biology and the developing child's interaction with principle caregivers during the first years of life. Damasio defines core self, produced from this interaction between proto self and external object, as the transient protagonist of consciousness (cf. 168-175). When Holland proposes that free associative film criticism can permit the individual to return to the formation of this basal neural interpretative framework, it makes sense to propose that returned to this state through reflective thought (that could be free associative film criticism) can allow the individual to gain an intimate knowledge of self.

While Damasio's model of core self might find parallels with Lichtenstein's identity theme, his model for autobiographical self and core consciousness may explain how watching movies can have an expansive role in viewers' lives. Damasio's third and more advanced level of self is the "autobiographical self" and represents the individual's autobiographical memory of multiple past events which will lead to an

¹ Establishing different levels of self, Damasio placed "proto-self" as the initial level of self below consciousness and the physical awareness of the individual. This represents the moment-by-moment state of the organism produced by interconnecting and temporarily coherent collections of neural pathways exhibited at multiple levels of the brain. It is automatic and below the level of consciousness because it "perceives" nothing and "knows" nothing. It represents a collection of brain devices whose main job is the automated management of the organism's life. (23)

anticipation of the future. It is rooted in the dispositional records of core self experiences. The memories are stored as “dispositional representations”, which physically store memories of interactions with external objects. If interposed structures are guardians of a core self, dispositional representations may offer a framework through which people interpret and assimilate new experiences. While dispositional representations are relatively stable under normal circumstances, as they arise out of core self, they are not static as they embrace new experiences. Dispositional representations are guardians of innate body processes and acquired knowledge:

I believe that this reposition of facts and strategies for their manipulation is stored, dormant and abeyantly, in the form of “dispositional representations” (dispositions for short) in the in-between brain sectors. Biological regulation, memory of previous states and planning of future actions result from cooperative activity not just in early sensory and motor cortices but also the in-between sectors (Damasio 200: 94)

Autobiographical self, together with core self, generates core consciousness. This proposal invites us to ask if “dispositions” can process contacts with film in the same manner as other objects, and thus act physically as an extension of a total living experience. After all, Damasio proposes that these records can be partially modified when other experiences are added to them. Dispositional representations are activated as neural patterns and transformed into explicit memories when repeatedly used (*cf.* 168-178). Perhaps one can think that films transmitting ideas that viewers want to transfer into their own lives can offer viewers new highways for thought and this constructive “in-between” spaces. They might offer solutions to real life problems and offer new ways of thinking, if the new thoughts become dominant as the viewer decides to concentrate on them and retain them in their mind. These ideas are especially relevant when considered within the context of Robert Sapolsky’s conclusion that the inability to distance oneself from real or hypothetical problems and feelings of social injustice is among the root causes of many of today’s stress-related diseases (*cf.* Sapolsky, 2004; 1-80, 362-383).

Scientific theory also helped me to understand why a special model had to be developed for teens. When I explained the free associative project to adults, most people could select a film free associatively easily, even when they did not work on the project. However, of all the teens I worked with, only two (A3 and A4), were able to choose a film free associatively. In general I had to use very structured methods when working

with adolescents. Even A3 and A4 worked in a structured method before making their free associative choices. At the time, I wondered if there was something wrong with the methods developed. I puzzled over my inability to engage interest in the teenage group in independent free associative film analysis until I heard Bud Craig's lecture "How do you feel? The neuroanatomical basis for awareness of human feelings from the body" at 12th *International Neuropsychoanalysis Congress* in June 2011 (Craig 2011).

Craig proposed that neural core control networks continue to develop through adolescence until the early twenties, going through a particularly strong reorganization in mid-late adolescence. This is also a period (he claimed) where behaviors, especially when reinforced, can to a certain extent "reprogram" the brain. Craig is not alone making these proposals. Jay Giedd, an investigator with the US National Institute of Health carried out an extensive study to evaluate brain development from childhood to adulthood. Nearly 400 volunteers aged between 3 and 27 years of age were evaluated by fMRI, and all cases included in the final report remained healthy and free of psychopathologies over the period of the study. Giedd discovered that though human brains do not undergo much change in size from 6 to 20 years of age, significant reorganization occurs within the brain itself.

During adolescence the brain acquires many executive function enhancements as brain modules become more integrated. While primary motor functions develop and mature early, Giedd was surprised that dorsolateral prefrontal cortexes only develop fully in the twenties. These are responsible for higher functions involving integration of basis processings and also integrated memory, audiovisual input and objection recognition. Giedd thus concluded that the brain goes through structural changes long after puberty (Geidd, 2008). Without denying the influences hormones play on the amygdala and hippocampus, Giedd suggested that some of the behaviors previously ascribed solely to hormonal activity might have their origins in part in physical neural reconstruction. These findings have been supported by later work carried out by Fair *et al* (2009) and Dosenbach *et al* (2009). If my teenage volunteers' brains were going through major structural rearrangements, it is no wonder that it was difficult for them to do open free associative film analysis.

This idea also offered some explanations for the efficiency of the structured nature of the work with individual volunteers on trial 5, like A3, and with Anita. Many of the tasks I assigned Anita were based on the success of similar tasks with A3 and

other members of her group. Anita had just turned seventeen when she did the trial and A3 was sixteen. Anita had a very high TAI value (69) at the beginning of the work, while A3 had a very high SAI (70) and high-medium TAI (52). They both reacted very positively to watching *Elizabethtown*. Anita's SAI dropped to (26) and A3's to (32). They both wrote significant answers to the long answer questionnaire indicating that watching *Elizabethtown* had been very constructive for them. The theoretical definition and discussion of anxiety as a concrete phenomenon that could be identified and controlled was important. Following these discussions A3 adhered to her "new" ideas and they worked very well for her. Because personal connections to movie scenes offered A3 such positive alternatives, I asked Anita to write free associatively to selected scenes from *Elizabethtown*. I also asked Anita to use her free associative texts and the images they conjured up for her to control her anxiety spirals, because of the results A3 had obtained.

After this structured work with *Elizabethtown*, they both wrote free associative film criticism. Anita followed specific instruction, while A3 worked alone to a film of her choice.

This structured method worked very well for Anita and she developed efficient coping skills quickly. Once *Elizabethtown* offered her the model, she attached to this very quickly and changed her way of thinking and acting. Her connections with Drew and scenes from *Elizabethtown* offered her a positive model that allowed her see that success can grow out of failure, that happiness is possible despite the circumstances, and above all that life is precious and we can aspire to live it openheartedly and expectantly. Considering Craig's proposals, I wondered if the structured thoughts derived from her specific free associative texts, gave her not only the ability to accept her unique way of being/interacting with the world, but also physical neural paths to allow her to interrupt destructive thought cycles and build new habit patterns.

As already indicated, in our final interview I learned from A3 that she had also written free associatively to *Howl's Moving Castle* for her Reading Project assignment. However, though she had done this over two years before our interview, she told me that she still thought about her connections with Sophie. Free associating to this movie, which had been a personal free associative choice, had helped her understand and accept herself and given her appropriate and progressive models. She told me that when she first free associated to scenes where Sophie is rewarded for being honest, kind, and

responsible, putting others before herself despite her shyness, she rejoiced at Sophie's reward. However, over the years, the more she thought about Sophie, the more she considered that she too deserved an outcome like Sophie's. Miyazaki's Sophie offered A3 a positive representation that allowed her to think that a shy, industrious, kind-hearted girl could aspire to happiness and success without changing her way of being in the world. Her reduced STAI readings and her obvious happiness and success in her academic and personal life seemed to indicate that she was on the right track.

The free associative film analysis showed that any film can offer awareness of self and new ways of thinking in the future as long as viewers interact with it in this way themselves. However, other types of reflective analysis of films appeared to require something in the film as only *Elizabethtown* produced this reaction on the group screenings. Since *Elizabethtown* and *Chocolate* were the films used most on group screenings, I returned to the author's notes to see if I could learn something about the narrative style and inspiration to see if this could shed some light on the question.

Despite offering a "simple story" Cameron Crowe set out to write a script that defied the rigid physical formats, with dialogues presented in structured forms and specific operational instruction, that film scripts normally followed. In the Introduction to the published script Crowe wrote that with *Elizabethtown* , he set out to write a movie that inhabited its own world and contradicted standard formats by beginning with an ending and ending with a beginning:

Every movie has its own world, and its own language, but I've always held a special affection for the personal films that a director makes with no one looking over his shoulder, and only his private heart as a guide.

[...] Returning to Kentucky, the story of *Elizabethtown* came pouring out of me ... a story about success and failure, life and love and death, and a group of characters who all learn in their own surprising ways what it's like to truly be alive. It begins with an ending and ends with a beginning ... and the knowledge that sadness and disappointment is often a deeper personal victory in disguise. (Crowe 2005: vii)

Also this script was written in a free flowing style, and Crowe actually completed it in only six weeks as the story "flowed out of him". Crowe delved into issues very pertinent to contemporary life, success and failure, love, life and death, above all he questioned what it means to be "truly alive" in contemporary American society. He did all this while he tried to tease out what his father's premature death had really meant to him:

Elizabethtown began as a road trip I took through my father's home state of Kentucky. I hadn't been back there since his funeral years earlier. At the time I was stunned at how his passing brought out the best in everyone around him, all the memories, the joy, the sadness, the laughter, and the characters from our family's rich history came together in an uplifting explosion. (idem)

So this film that began with Crowe's actual road trip in Kentucky takes its viewers on an unusual ride. On the Production Notes on *Elizabethtown* , Crowe's description of the actual writing of *Elizabethtown* reminded me of my volunteers' free associative writing. Evoked by a physical stimulant – the Kentucky landscape – the story was written in a “single burst”. It returned Crowe to his trip thirteen years earlier, allowing him to revisit and untangle the ongoing significance of prior events:

It was the summer of 2002, shortly after the release of “Vanilla Sky,” and Crowe was on the road touring with his wife, Nancy Wilson, of the rock band Heart. He found himself on a tour bus traveling through Kentucky and was struck by the intense beauty of the landscape. The last time he saw what he calls “these electric blue hillsides” was when he returned for his father's funeral in 1989. That was all the inspiration he needed. As Crowe recalls, “I dropped off the Heart tour, got a rental car, got lost in Kentucky, and wrote the whole story for the script in a burst.” For Crowe, telling this story was an extremely personal and often emotional endeavor. (n/a: 2005)

In an interview with Paul Fischer, Crowe expanded on the notion that the story of *Elizabethtown* was a tale flowing entirely from within him when he stated “I didn't really have a choice in it. It kind of arrived and knocked the other story that I was working on completely out of the picture.” (Fischer, 2005) However, despite its inspiration and that fact that it begins with an ending and ends with a beginning, *Elizabethtown* is not totally without a structure. In fact, Crowe has very clear ideas about structural elements. He wanted to write a folktale about life in America at the time that would end simply with one word:

Well there were a few things from life that I knew had to be in the story, just things that had happened to me and I'd experienced, and then there were other things that were just part of a yarn that I wanted to kind of spin in a Garrison Keillor way that would just be a little portrait of real life in America right now. I always liked a story that kind of started with a big concept and introduced you to a bunch of characters, but by the end of the story it was a very simple point that it made - and in this movie it ends with the last word and it's sort of the story completes itself on the last word in a very simple way, and I just like the structure of that too and, so it's partially autobiography and part kind of a folktale. (n/a 2005)

So though the story may have “flowed out” of Crowe, it was crafted by a storyteller who was looking to produce a certain aesthetic form – a folk tale. It followed a specific

narrative orientation – large to small – terminating the message of the whole story in a single final word: Life! It's a modern folktale full of hope Drew is not swallowed up by evil Phil and he escapes to life following the breadcrumbs offered by Claire's road map. In the Production Notes Crowe wrote that he wanted to draw characters that viewers would want to keep in mind after viewing. He wanted to write a script "that introduced you to characters who felt real, who took you into their lives and when that movie was over... you missed those people you'd met two hours earlier." (n/a 2005)

Having read Crowe's ideas, Drew's journey reminded me more and more of many of the great journeys of American literature. As Huck Finn's trip along the Mississippi with Jim allowed Mark Twain to consider the role of black and white in an evolving society, *Elizabethtown* not only explores Crowe's attempt to come to terms with the loss of his father and its implications for his own adult life; it also asks bigger questions, like: "How can we not only survive, but find happiness and the awareness of truly being alive in the midst of the chaos that is modern life?" This apparently light, piece-of-fluff movie explores serious issues with humor and the grace that comes from a genuine effort to untangle personal issues generously and publicly. A young man wandering through the American countryside, Drew discovers what it means to be alive – and perhaps the disconcerted narrative form of the modern day folk tale opens a door for viewers to follow his examples.

There are various open invitations to establish connection with the dilemmas Drew faces as he deals with death, failure and inability to feel grief, as well as concepts of home, family, friends and so many other things. The film does not offer solutions, just journeys; even in terms of structure it does not really end as it leaves us halfway between home and home. However, as the credits roll, the voiceover confronts viewers to expect challenges and encourages persistence. As the film ends, the word: "Life" (Crowe: 2005a) reverberates demanding engagement and contemplation. I wondered if all the questions asked and connections points raised throughout the film encourage viewers to connect with it personally as they do.

In terms of structure Joanne Harris's *Chocolat* (1999) is a very different story, even if it also offers a personal story. It follows a more standard format and pursues specific questions, which the author already had answers for. On her official web site *Joanne Harris*, Harris wrote that she wanted to write a story about a mother and daughter. She also wanted to explore the reactions that the arrival of a single outsider

could provoke in a small community and teased out the story, reflecting on the strong women in her extended family who ruled their kitchens and flaunted conventions:

My daughter was three when I wrote *Chocolat*. She is one of the main characters in the story, as is her imaginary rabbit, Pantoufle. I like to think that was what began it; for the first time I felt ready to write like a mother, to try and express some of what it felt like to me.

[...] I first planned out this story during the Easter holidays, and so it seemed natural to me that I should set it at that time. Easter to me has many memories and associations, all of them French; elaborate carnivals, egg-hunts in my great-grandmother's garden, the story about the flying bells, the exquisite displays in the windows of the confiseries and pâtisseries.

[...] I also wanted to write about people, and about how the arrival of a single individual can affect the internal politics of a community.

[...] Nor is the book set at any particular time. I deliberately wanted to give it an old-fashioned feel, to suggest that this was a place where nothing had changed in many years, whilst retaining some elements of modern life. (Harris, 2000)

As I read Harris's notes and thought about the book, I realized that although it raises social issues, it revolves around the mother/daughter relationship, one of the most secure elements of the whole story. Volunteers on the trials seemed to share this opinion after watching the movie. In both the book and film, the six-week period from Shrove Tuesday to Easter Sunday during which the plot unfolds is much more important than any real geographic or historical reference. Also, although the stories that produce the effects in both representations are different, the two maintain the mysterious and magical elements that Harris attributed to Vianne and Anouk's characters. The reductions in state anxiety levels observed in the STAI questionnaires indicate that enjoyment does matter, as enjoying the movie led to relaxation and reductions in anxiety levels. In terms of narrative, the movie might also have returned older viewers in rural areas to past events and presented younger viewers with an exposé of a different reality. However, volunteers' long answers show that this was not what led to STAI reductions; rather, these are attributed to the well-told story which viewers enjoyed.

Harris also explained on her website that she considered the film offered a faithful representation of the original novel, even if there were some differences in the storylines. The villains are different in the two works and while both book and film take place in rural France, the historical setting is not the same. The book unfolds in the

1990s; the film is set in 1950s and influenced by both world wars. However, Harris enjoyed the new villain and was very pleased about the transfer of enjoyment from literary text to the screen, because for the author one of the book's most important messages had been "that enjoyment matters":

Lasse Hallström's film of *Chocolat* [...] is in many ways very true to the original. It has been sweetened to some extent, and simplified to meet the needs of a cinema audience, but I think the adaptation is fair and remains close in spirit, if not always in detail, to the book. Most importantly, it is immensely enjoyable - if the book has a message, then it is that enjoyment matters - and although readers may feel that the film occasionally lacks edge, I think it more than makes up for it in simple charm. The ensemble of the cast is wonderful; with Juliette Binoche a luminous Vianne; Judi Dench a tetchy Armande with a dirty laugh; Alfred Molina a hulking, intense but oddly vulnerable Reynaud. The visuals are stunning, especially the interiors - you can almost smell the chocolate - and the inclusion of a Mayan fairytale backstory works very well alongside the 50s French nostalgia. As adaptations go, this seems to me to be a sensitive and faithful one; certainly not as dark as the book, but I like milk chocolate too. (Harris, 2000)

Harris had a clear plot structure that she wished to explore in a specific manner and she wrote a very entertaining and structured story, fitting into a specific six-week period and exploring particular issues. Consequently, it seems that volunteers picked up on Harris's intentions and took pleasure in watching *Chocolate* as a well-woven story with an emphasis on enjoyment. This allowed them to relax and get lost (and found) in the nowhere land of a mysterious chocolatier. However, the situation with *Elizabethtown* was different. Crowe commented in the Production Notes on the movie that he enjoyed the idea of writing a story that started out with an extended cast and multiple scenarios, but that ended with a single word. He did this with *Elizabethtown*, and volunteers seemed to tap into his single word ending: "Life." Thinking about the responses to this movie, I wondered if the structure of this folktale offering many open-ended questions and, no closed answers just aspirations, permitted viewers to add their own questions to Drew's and consequently connect intimately with the movie. Meandering through the American heartlands while grappling with intense personal and communal dilemmas, Drew's behavior and reactions ask many questions as he tries to come to terms with the consequences of success and failure, love and death and finally gains aspirations for a new beginning. *Elizabethtown's* modern day folktale starting with a would be ending and ending with a presumed beginning permits Crowe to explore questions about what it means "to really be alive" in contemporary society. Despite all their differences, conceivably the fictional language that Mark Twain created for Huck Finn could be

compared to the fictional narrative that Cameron Crowe delivered to Drew, in so far as both allow their audiences to contemplate new and personal responses to contemporary dilemmas. Within, this context, perhaps the biggest difference between *Chocolate* and *Elizabethtown* is their narrative structure, which in the case of *Elizabethtown* offers viewers many open-ended questions that they can easily pick up, while the structured story presented in *Chocolate* speaks more to enjoyment and relaxation.

Finally, the practical trials demonstrated that contact with fictional worlds may affect immediate anxiety states and encourage the development of enhanced coping skills in the long term. Considerations presented validate the relevance of literature and film for a better human environment, both at individual and collective levels, especially because it demonstrates that these can be used actively to help people control high state anxiety levels. I consider that this finding is especially relevant in the present-day context of exponential growth in anxiety disorders and stress related illnesses. It also showed that relevant contact with fictional narratives can help people to look inside and outside themselves, breaking redundant negative thought spirals, as readers and viewers embrace new ideas and new realities that allow them to see their own lives from different and broader perspectives. These can permit the recovery of hope, avoidance of destructive thought and habit patterns, construction of new futures, and perhaps even break cellular stress induction systems.

It also demonstrated that understanding how involvement with fictional narratives may affect readers and viewers physically, could be relevant for the construction of literary programs for audiences not used to engaging with literary texts. These considerations could be particularly useful to help readers and viewer engage with longer and more demanding texts.

Despite the advantages offered, the methods used do not diminish the individuality of the movie going experience. They appear to encourage the blossoming of some alternative paradigms that can arise from the contemplation and construction of simple stories offered and produced by reflective contact with film (and literature). Perhaps Aida's comments on the project summarize my aspirations for it and for future developments that might arise from it. She wrote that doing free associative film analysis allowed her to see things that she had not seen before in fictional narratives and in this way intensified not only her interchanges with these, but her whole living experience. Referring to Eugénio de Andrade's verse to demonstrate how she felt the

free associative film analysis project had represented an important mark in her life, she defined her capacity to extract meaning from fictional narratives in terms of before and after her involvement in the project. This demonstrates an amplification and fine tuning of the capacity to appreciate the arts and life in general. My aspiration is that the work presented in this thesis can permit new avenues of thought both on the relevance of simple stories offered in film (and literature) and on alternative ways of working with these.

We pass things without seeing them,
used, like aged animals:
if someone calls to us we don't reply,
if someone asks us to love we don't shudder,
as fruit grown in the shadow tasteless,
continually falling to the ground, rotten.

Eugénio de Andrade
(my translation)

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