AUDIO DESCRIPTION AND SEMIOTICS:
*The Translation of Films for Visually-Impaired Audiences*

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Declaration of Originality

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Abstract

This thesis explores the translation of mainstream film imagery in audio description (AD) for visually-impaired audiences, looking specifically at the intersemiotic transfer (from the visual to the verbal mode) of visual constructions important to connotational meaning. The original contribution of this work is the improved qualitative understanding of how viewing value may be enhanced for the users of film AD through the inclusion of imagery that presents wider opportunities for meaning-making. This research was based on the hypothesis that traditional forms of film AD may not adequately provide for visual connotation even though this is an integral part of filmmaking important to the expression of meanings beyond the basic story. Moreover, that visually-impaired people with intact cognitive function have an ability to conceptualise imagery in equivalent ways to sighted people. Traditionally, film AD has been a means of ‘filling in the gaps’ between dialogue and sounds to provide users with simple and coherent stories in the context of what can be heard. However, films are semiotic systems (Mitry, 2000: 15) communicating to audiences via complex patterns of visual and auditory signs, so whilst current practice in AD may respond to the legal requirement of access for all, access may not be equivalent if important elements of imagery are not adequately transferred. Based on three qualitative sources of data: the analysis of film and AD content, the testing of different AD versions and a semi-structured interview with respondents, this research sought to understand whether visual imagery important to wider levels of meaning is adequately handled in film AD in the UK and what this means in terms of value for target users. Whilst it was found that more sophisticated content is sometimes included, transfer is widely inconsistent, with consequential loss in value for AD target users.
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Abbreviations

AD       Audio Description
AMD      Age-related Macular Degeneration
AN       Audio Narration
ATVOD    Authority for Television on Demand
AV       Audio-visual
AVT      Audio-visual Translation
D-E      Dynamic Equivalence
F-E      Formal Equivalence
ICT      Information Communication Technology
IMDB     Internet Movie Database
ITC      Independent Television Commission
NCW      New College Worcester
Ofcom    Office of Communications
PG       Parental Guidance
RNIB     Royal National Institute for Blind People
SL       Source Language
TL       Target Language
TV       Television
VI       Visual Impairment / Visually-impaired

Conventions

Windows Media time codes in the format ‘00:00–00:00’ are used to reference specific segments of film from the DVDs analysed. In the transcription of audio descriptions, significant pauses within a continual sequence of description are indicated by an oblique in the text, with relevant music and sounds indicated within square brackets. For example:

AD:   Frank and April march down a clean white corridor, both looking straight ahead / April is behind Frank. She carries a case and a cardigan in her other hand [steps heard].

(05:01–05:13)

(Revolutionary Road, Mendes, 2008)
1. Introduction

Audiences with visual impairment (VI) rely upon audio description (AD) to more fully access and comprehend films. Access is facilitated by verbal accounts, synchronised to the original film content, that tell the VI spectator something about characters, settings, action and temporality, and which explain ambiguous sounds. As Holland summarises: “Essentially, [AD] is an attempt to make accessible a work […] for an audience who are either blind or have partial sight by giving in a verbal form some of the information which a sighted person can easily access” (2009: 170). However, being both a partial and verbalised account of what is essentially visual information, many of the aesthetic, thematic and culturally valid constructions of film, which are an inherent part of film narrative constituting semiotic expression (or signs), may be lost or rendered ineffective on transference to AD. Through a qualitative approach to film AD and audience reception, it is the aim of this research to verify how signs are handled in film description and how the inclusion or absence of semiotic content might affect value in the viewing experience for AD target users.

1.1. Background

The importance of access has long been recognised by organisations such as the UK’s RNIB (Royal National Institute for Blind People), with whose help AD was first trialled on television in the 1990s as part of a research campaign by the Audetel (Audio Described Television) Consortium set up by the Independent Television Commission (ITC) (Ofcom, 2000: 4), as a result of which best-practice guidelines were produced on how to write AD for different types of content and age groups. This work was partially funded by the European Commission (Ofcom, 2000: 4), which promotes access-for-all in anti-discrimination directives. At this time, lobbying for AD for theatrical release films was “a real team effort”, with the RNIB working with umbrella groups, such as the Film Distributors Association and the Cinema Exhibitors Association (Greening, 2013: personal communication). The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act was also coming into effect, which may have encouraged action on the part of a number of bodies, including the Cinema Exhibitors Association, film distributors, the RNIB, specialist manufacturers and the UK Film Council (Greening, 2013: personal communication). It is thanks to the work of individuals such as Joan Greening, then at the RNIB, changes in legislation, wider publicity (including an advertising campaign on UK television in 2008 and on a smaller scale in 2012), plus advancements in technology, that AD has become increasingly common in the UK, with a requirement for the majority of television channels to audio describe programmes at increased levels from 2% to 10% from 2005 to
2009 (Ofcom, 2010: 8). And although this service is still relatively new and so unknown to many visually-impaired people (Greening and Rolph, 2007: 131; Ofcom, 2011: personal communication), where AD has been taken up, consumers have reported an enhanced viewing experience (Greening and Rolph, 2007: 127). This situation would seem to indicate that AD is an effective service governed by national and regulatory bodies. However, the accent of UK guidelines and legislation concerning AD is on televisual media, with no formal rules on the audio description of film.

The most commonly audio described films in the UK are mainstream British and American films (as opposed to World Cinema or Art House films). These command the largest market in terms of UK box office and DVD sales, including big budget Hollywood films that are normally seen by over 100 million people worldwide (Stafford, 2007: 9), as well as lower budget British films, which are of cultural interest to British audiences. In view of the increasing quantity of AD that is being produced for mainstream films in the UK, together with limitations in existing guidelines and a lack of regulation in this area, it is worth exploring how effective AD is in capturing and transferring the constructed elements of film that contribute to deeper levels of meaning and how, in turn, this may contribute to the overall viewing experience for visually-impaired users. In summary, access for the visually-impaired consumer of popular film may not simply concern the availability of AD as an audio option, but also the quality of content received.

1.2. Justification for the research

This research is based on the qualitative principle that semiotic form is an integral characteristic of mainstream films and that its formal inclusion in film AD would constitute an equivalence in translation that would present target audiences with greater opportunities to explore and interpret film narrative. This is an issue of both quality and equality since an AD service that does not attend to the stylistic, technical and symbolic features of films might be considered to limit access to a certain extent.

Mainstream films are made to communicate to audiences in various narrative and cultural contexts (Bignell, 2002: 197), with much of this communication channelled implicitly via carefully constructed visual signs rather than explicitly through character dialogue: from the way scenes are shot, edited and assembled and title sequences and credits are put together, to the way films are marketed and distributed to the public (Bignell, 2002: 199). In film AD, elements that are typically associated with the immediate story, including details of character appearance, location and action in particular, are commonly
transferred (Salway, 2007). In fact, following a detailed, corpus-based analysis of the weighting of word choice in film AD, Salway (2007) confirmed a strong preference towards action verbs, phrases describing temporality and the way characters look, and who or what they are looking at. He thus argues that the dominance of these phrases in AD “makes them important narrative elements for story-telling in film” (Salway, Vassiliou and Ahmad, 2005 referenced by Salway, 2007: 163). However, film narrative consists of more than just “fabula”; that is, “the basic story stuff, the logic of actions or the syntax of characters, the time-oriented course of events” (Eco, 1979: 27). Salway’s corpus pertains predominantly to aspects of “first level story” (Eco, 1979: 28), whereas a significant part of film narrative consists of visual connotation generated through “style”, which leads to “second meaning, whose signifier is a certain ‘treatment’ of the image [...] and whose signified, whether aesthetic or ideological, refers to a certain ‘culture’ of the society receiving the message” (Barthes, 1977: 17). As Barthes confirms: “a narrative is not merely to move from one word to the next, it is also to move from one level to the next” (1977: 87). But Salway does not directly refer to culturally connotative content in the AD transcripts analysed, so the existence of secondary level significance in film AD is unclear. In the absence of further evidence, this content might, therefore, be absent, marginalised or in some way concealed in film AD, which has implications for product quality and the value of film for AD users. Ultimately, restricted forms of AD could be limiting for the consumer group it wishes to assist, whilst there may be no reason for such forms to prevail, particularly if people with visual impairment were shown to be as equally receptive to the connotative language of media and social culture as sighted people.

Fundamental arguments in disability studies claim that disability is a “social construct”, that people with physical impairments are excluded by the limiting nature of social norms (Rioux, 2002: 220), but that they should not have to "adapt to the world as they find it" (Lee, 2002: 147), but should be given the right to participate in a society that adapts to their needs (Barnes et al., 2002). Although films are not made with visually-impaired people in mind, they may nevertheless be adapted for visually-impaired audiences with the provision of adequate audio description. Here, Udo and Fels highlight the importance of “equitable use” based on the provision of equal or equivalent methods of access, with the aim of satisfying all users and precluding discrimination (2010: 191). The notion of ‘equivalent’ rather than ‘equal’ access is imperative, however, since it may not be practical to provide equal access to persons with quite different needs. In AD, for example, it would be impractical and unhelpful to describe in minute detail due to the limited timeframes in which audio description can be added and in which audiences can realistically process the different sources of information. It is, therefore, more appropriate to seek equivalence in the
transference of visual content in film AD, finding corresponding language terms that offer similar opportunities for target users to receive and process content. There is, additionally, no reason to believe that people with VI would be unresponsive to connotative language in AD since they belong to the same society and, therefore, “speech community” as sighted people (Piety, 2004) (where “speech community” infers a reliance upon “a wide measure of agreement in the use of words” for society to operate effectively (Nida, 1964: 48)).

Within the UK, as many as 48 percent of visually-impaired people live in moderate to complete isolation (RNIB, 2012: online), thereby relying on accessible and inclusive channels of communication. This statistic is also set to grow as the population of the Western world ages and debilitating conditions associated with growing old increase (Albrecht, 2002: 18), including visual impairment. Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which makes audio-visual translation (AVT) possible, creates access to otherwise inaccessible media and, therefore, to diverse channels of information. In other words, ICT determines “who gets information and who does not” (Díaz Cintas et al., 2007: 11–12) and, as such, who is socially connected or excluded. This means that AV media, as a primary means of communication today (Kress, 2003: 1), is active in social inclusion. Technology is also important in social evolution (Danesi, 1999: 160), which implies a role for ICT in social development. But for this to take place, AV media must hold communicative value for receivers, since purely denotative content is rhetorically ineffective (Barthes, 1977: 30) whilst connotation exerts influence on thought and social behaviour. Thus, in film AD, the transfer of content of ‘first level story’, to the exclusion of wider forms of expression, could be considered excluding of people with VI from social communication.

In view of the above, the principal aim of this research is to contribute to the understanding of how the connotative signs of films, where included in film AD, might enhance the value of this access service for visually-impaired people in a socially-inclusive process of media communication. The originality of this work stems from a lack of investigation into the inter-modality of AD, from the predominantly visual aspects of film to verbalised descriptions, and from a lack of qualitative data on how audio described films are perceived and processed by target users in the UK. According to Braun, semiotic theory lacks an appreciation of the “processing perspective” in the use of sign systems, which is a perspective that could benefit audio describers in understanding their own practice and how audiences process AD content (2008). This study is, therefore, conducted from a qualitative and cognitive processing perspective, investigating the significance of film signs and their value for the target users of AD.
1.3. Research problems and scope of investigation

There are a number of issues relating to film AD in the UK that may limit the extent to which the visual constructions of film are currently transferred, namely:

(i) Film AD for theatrical, DVD and Blu-ray® release is not regulated in the UK, with Ofcom overseeing the implementation of media access legislation for television broadcasts only. In turn, the ITC Guidance on Standards for Audio Description, produced as a result of investigation into AD for TV access, and the subsequent updates to these guidelines, do not fully represent AD for film, being outside the scope of Audetel and Ofcom’s work.

(ii) Film production companies do not participate in or validate the way in which AD is produced for their products. Often no additional information accompanies the film files sent to audio describers, and where shooting scripts are supplied, these are sometimes inaccurate (Greening, 2013: personal communication). A lot of detail may also be missed by audio describers in the process of writing due to ‘spoilers’ (logos and text) on screen and the poor quality of film prints (Greening, 2013: personal communication). Furthermore, not all audio describers have had formal training in media translation and may be unable to recognise the devices of film construction used in the generation of meaning.

(iii) The intensely visual nature of films, together with their intermittent dialogue, music and sounds, means that there is a great deal of information that could potentially be described during very limited gaps in the soundtrack, so audio describers must choose a concise number of elements to include at appropriate moments, with a loss of other information. Such disparity between the visual and verbal modes in AD transfer (Haig, 2006) makes the audio describer’s task of selecting and verbalising difficult, if not, at times, impossible.

(iv) There are real-time constraints in the post-production processing of film AD, which impact upon how much time audio describers have to make their decisions, carry out research, write and voice an AD text and carry out quality checks. There is also no longer time to amend cinematic versions of AD before the DVD release since these are now being created at the same time (Greening, 2013: personal communication).

(v) Audience make-up (culture, belief, age, gender, education, background, interests) is diverse, and the heterogeneity of sight conditions (Warren, 1984: 298) further individualises members of a visually-impaired audience. This means that even AD aimed at a very broad audience base will not be accessible to all, and so audio
describers may be aiming for simplicity rather than the transference of more abstract or specialised forms.

These issues raise the question of whether there is scope for the inclusion of potentially complex visual elements in film AD; that is, whether sign forms would be straightforward for audio describers to recognise, understand and appropriately reproduce in the verbal mode within short timeframes, and whether target audiences in general would gain value from their inclusion. The research questions arising from these issues are broken down as follows:

1. **What visual forms are important to connotational significance in mainstream films and how can they be understood?**

2. **Do AD texts attend to these forms appropriately?**

3. **What value does the audio description of visual imagery have for target users?**

The following chapters are laid out in response to these questions:

*Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Review of Relevant Literature*

Since AD is an emerging field of study much has been borrowed from other sources in an interdisciplinary approach that invites a greater depth of experience to the work. First, semiotic theory, or the study of signs, offers a philosophical and practical means of understanding films, including linguistic terms that may be adapted in AV translation. As Stafford outlines, “semiotics [...] drew on much earlier work in linguistics to suggest that media texts could be studied in order to reveal their systematic use of particular signs” (2007: 80). Moreover, film theory provides the basis for understanding methods and motivations in film construction and offers a benchmark for the reception of film by standard (sighted) audiences. Cognitive studies in visual impairment also help to pinpoint the needs of audiences with VI and their ability to construct mental imagery from linguistic terms. Additionally, it is helpful to understand current practice in audio description, as influenced and understood by legislation, professionals and theorists, to verify whether AD is evolving or whether there are limitations in this field that prohibit certain practices or change. Finally, a look at traditional translation models is of benefit in the ascertainment of how equivalence may be achieved in film AD and how change, where applicable and possible, may actually be accomplished.
Chapter 3: Methodological Approach

The question of how AV source material is interpreted by audio describers and the specific problems in “cross-modal” (Braun, 2008) translation are central to the methodological approach set out in chapter 3. This chapter outlines the framework for the descriptive qualitative analysis of film and AD content, with the specific objective of understanding which sign forms are important in the generation of connotative meaning, how these might be interpreted and whether they are attended to appropriately by audio describers. A schema for the adjustment and testing of alternative segments of film AD, together with the semi-structured interviewing of both sighted and visually-impaired participants, is also presented in this chapter with the aim of appreciating how visually impaired people might understand the semiotic content of film in comparison to the understandings of sighted users (the ‘norm’ in film viewing) and what potential value these elements might have for target users.

Chapter 4: Qualitative Analysis of Film and AD Data

The data analysis chapter specifically addresses all 3 of the research questions, presenting findings from the descriptive analysis of 10 audio described mainstream English-language films available on DVD in the UK, identifying the semiotic elements important to connotation in film and examining how this content is approached in AD presently. The data ensuing from observable patterns across all of the films analysed is also summarised under the general categories of film construction: genre, mise-en-scène, camera techniques and montage, with additional comments on music and sounds, to enable more concrete conclusions to be drawn in respect of film imagery and the ability of audio describers to reproduce this appropriately in the verbal form of AD.

Chapter 5: AD Testing and Semi-structured Interviews

Chapter 5 consists of the analysis of qualitative data collected during a supplementary study designed to complement understandings in the film and AD content analysis in respect of the value of semiotic content for AD users, as more directly responds to research question 3. Primary data resulting from the testing of original and adjusted samples of film AD on 10 respondents (5 visually-impaired and 5 normally-sighted), together with the individual feedback received from these subjects in semi-structured interviews, is analysed in this chapter with the aim of understanding viewer preferences and the capacity or limitations of visually-impaired people to interpret film imagery on an
equivalent basis as sighted people, as well as, ultimately, the value of such content for real film consumers.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

In addition to analysis chapters 4 and 5, and in summary of this thesis, chapter 6 presents the general conclusions of this work. This chapter consolidates the responses to each research question, reinforcing the outcomes of the theories hypothesised. Also of consideration is the novelty and worth of this study, how the methods and findings fit in with current theoretical literature across the relevant disciplines of semiotics, film and translation studies, and the meaning of this in the ‘real world’ of audio description. This chapter, thus, summarises this research in terms of the contributions made (6.2), including the implications for theory (6.2.1) and for policy and practice (6.2.2), additionally outlining the limitations in the research method (6.3), whilst highlighting potential areas for further investigation (6.4).
2. Theoretical Framework and Review of Relevant Literature

The main point of this investigation is to understand whether, under the aforementioned circumstances, signs can be easily identified and reproduced in the verbal mode of film AD and effectively processed by target users. It is first important, however, to clarify from existing theoretical sources what is meant by ‘signs’ and to what purpose semiotic content is used. The first part of this chapter will, therefore, address the comprehension of signs (2.1.1), their purpose and significance in mainstream film (2.1.2) and the implications of visual impairment on understanding and the ability of people with VI to construct mental imagery (2.1.3). In the second part of this review, the European and UK legislation and guidelines relevant to audio description will be discussed (2.2.1) and current perspectives in film AD investigated (2.2.2) in order to establish any fundamental rules or issues in the communication of semiotic content to visually-impaired people. With the assumption that no formal translation models exist in film AD, this review will end with an exploration of translation and linguistic theory (2.2.3) and a research hypothesis for methodological investigation.

2.1. Semiotics and the Comprehension of Film

This section looks at fundamental concepts in semiotics to ascertain the purpose of signs and the terms that may be most useful in the analysis of semiotic content in film AD (2.1.1). Film theory is also explored with the aim of understanding how filmmakers use signs in the construction of narrative, so as to be able to recognise those elements with the most potential for connotational significance (2.1.2). An appreciation of how visually-impaired people might understand signs is then attained through a theoretical review of cognitive and neurological approaches in visual impairment (2.1.3).

2.1.1. Definitions in semiotics and the purpose of signs

Defining signs so as to identify and reproduce them appropriately in film AD is not straightforward. As Chandler relates: “The definition, scope and methodologies of semiotics vary from theorist to theorist” (2007: 211) with no “widely agreed theoretical assumptions, models or empirical methodologies” (2007: 4), which makes the understanding and classification of sign forms challenging. Some scholars also encompass both the ‘sign’ and the ‘symbolic’ within semiotics whilst others believe their
respective study to be separate sciences, which again causes confusion when attempting to approach these interpretatively in film. However, as Danesi points out: “The crux of semiotic analysis is, in effect, to unravel what something means, or more accurately, represents” (1999: 23), which forms the basis of this research in that the interpretation of signification in films will help to determine their potential value for audiences, whilst being an essential first step in the process of finding equivalence in film AD. Antecedent to the unravelling of meaning or representation, however, is an understanding of the semiological terms that may be applied in a study of this nature from the various definitions available.

The term ‘semiotics’, which was first used by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and relates to the study of signs, is generally used to describe modern, structuralist theories stemming from those of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) on the social meanings produced from linguistic systems wherein a ‘sign’ consists of a ‘signifier’ (its form) plus a ‘signified’ (its concept) (Saussure, 1959: 66). Such terms are commonly used in the structuralist approaches of semioticians, film theorists and linguists. Semiotician, Roland Barthes, for example, refers to the “two-sided Janus-like entity” of the sign in the “union” of signifier and signified (1953: 104). Like Saussure, he also appreciates that a sign is not the “thing” itself, “but the mental representation of the thing (concept)” (1953: 114), which makes this a “psychological phenomenon” (Saussure, 1959: 11). As “a concept in the mind” (Chandler, 2007: 16), Saussure considered the linguistic ‘signified’ to be arbitrary (1959: 67). However, this understanding of the relationship between the linguistic signifier and signified has since been considered limited (Chandler, 2007: 212). Kress, for example, questions the notion of arbitrariness, believing the relationship to be “motivated”, with signifying forms selected out of an “aptness for expressing that which is to be signified” (2003: 42). However, Saussure did acknowledge that symbols are “never wholly arbitrary”, using the scales of justice as an example (1959: 68), since a symbol can have “a rational relationship with the thing signified” (1959: 72) (although Sebeok defines this particular usage as iconic (1994: 89) ). As an alternative to Saussure’s theory of psychological understanding, Peirce put forward a “triadic” model wherein a sign includes a “representamen” (its form), an “interpretant” (how it is understood) and an external “object” (what the sign actually refers to) (Chandler, 2007: 29; Kress, 2003: 41). And although signs could effectively be classified as “signal”, “symptom”, “icon”, “index”, “symbol” or “name” (Sebeok, 1994: 20–38), Peirce believed there to be three main types: “icons” (signifiers that resemble their signifieds, such as portraits and photographs, sound effects, gestures and metaphorical expressions); “indexes” (signifiers that are indicative of their signifieds, such as signposts, symptoms and smoke), and “symbols” (deemed
arbitrary, such as the signs of language, which are conventional and must be learned) (Berger, 2011: 53). Amongst theorists, the definition of these terms are mostly similar, with Danesi, for example, defining an icon as “a sign that simulates, replicates, reproduces, imitates, or resembles properties of its referent” (1999: 34); and Sebeok advancing the sub-classification of ‘index’ as including “symptom, cue, clue, track, trail, and so forth” (1994: 71). In Peirce’s classification, signs can also belong to more than one group (Chandler, 2007: 44). A clock, for instance, which is a “primarily indexical sign, […] acquires a discernible symbolic content in addition if the timepiece happens to be Big Ben” (Sebeok, 1994: 21).

Semioticians also contextualise signs by looking at their relationships with other signs within sign systems (systems of meanings, such as films) (Hayward, 2000: 322) and exploring them in social contexts (Chandler, 2007: 8). As Saussure suggests: “The value of just any term is accordingly determined by its environment” (1959: 115), with which Barthes concurs: “the sign derives its value also from its surroundings” (1953: 113), which infers a link between the linguistic message and culture. Barthes explored social reality in cultural terms, that is within a ‘second-order semiological system’, consisting of denotational (literal or first order) meaning, and connotational (inferential or second order) meaning (1957). Within this system, “something denoted” is always present and forms the basis of communication (Barthes, 1953: 151), but these denotive, first order signifiers also comprise those of the second order, or connotation (Barthes, 1953: 152). A number of denotive signifiers might be used to form one unit of connotation (“the tone of a text”, for example) (Barthes, 1953: 152), which makes connotation a “wider” system than that of denotation (Barthes, 1953: 149). Connotation is also formed through straightforward or more abstract associations that require greater cognitive effort. A bookcase, for example, might indicate a person of intelligence, or an image of gas chamber doors could symbolise “the funeral gates of ancient mythologies” (Barthes, 1977: 22). Moreover, Barthes extended the notion of connotational meaning to include what Hartley (1982) termed a “third order”, wherein ideological meanings (“myth”) can be activated by signs (Hayward, 2000: 322). These different levels of signification afford “a manageable set of signs to represent a large array of potential meanings” (Danisi, 1999: 27). Accordingly, the denotational meaning of a sign is only one value in a possible series of significance (Chandler, 2007: 140), wherein signs form linkage in “a network of intertwined meanings” (Danisi, 1999: 29) and a process of “unlimited semiosis […], where each term is explained by other terms and where each one is, through an infinite chain of interpretants, potentially explainable by all the others” (Peirce referenced by Eco, 1979: 74). Meaning can,
therefore, ensue from the “translation of a sign into another sign” and can be “everything that is semantically implied by a sign” (Eco, 1979: 184).

In Saussurean terms, the sign makes these meanings ‘paradigmatically’ and ‘syntagmatically’, with the paradigmatic concerning the choice of elements and their possible alternatives, and the syntagmatic relating to the signifying relationships of these forms within sign systems (Hayward, 2000: 322). As Metz (1974: x) explains:

> Syntagmatic relations are those which exist among the actual (or ‘present’) elements of a statement, and paradigmatic (or associative) relations are those which occur among the potential (or ‘absent’) elements of a statement (those elements which might have been but were not actually selected). A syntagma is, consequently, a unit of actual relationship, while a paradigm is a unit of potential relationship.

In short, the “paradigmatic structure involves differentiation, syntagmatic structure involves combination” (Danesi, 1999: 43). The paradigmatic is, therefore, synchronic and “static”, whereas the syntagmatic is diachronic and concerns changes over time (Saussure, 1959: 81).

Furthermore, Peirce included an “interpretant” in his triadic model of sign comprehension (representamen–interpretant–object), which implies that interpretation of signs depends on codes, or rules (Chandler, 2007: 147). For Eco, however, Peirce’s interpretant “is the idea to which the sign gives rise in the mind of the interpreter” (1979: 183), implying that the interpretant is, rather, the ‘signified’, or ‘concept’, itself, which does not explain how interpretations are formed. Similarly, Barthes refers to the process of unifying signifiers and signifieds as “signification” (1953: 150–151). However, the synchronic and diachronic network of signs both infers and requires a “framework” for interpretation of content to take place, and this is provided by “codes” (Chandler, 2007: 147). As Danesi outlines: “A code is an organizing grid of signs; it is what allows individuals to extract meanings from signs” (1999: 29). As such, codes are learnt “patterns of association”, mental structures, that influence our interpretation of signs in every-day life (Berger, 1991: 23). Language, for example, is a coded system of signs, wherein words are joined in various ways to create messages (Danesi, 1999: 5), as “transmitted from a sign producer, or source, to a sign receiver, or destination” (Sebeok, 1994: 6). Thus, the “[e]ncoding” and “decoding” of signs infers the use of codes, “a set of unambiguous rules whereby messages are convertible from one representation to another” (Sebeok, 1994: 9), the shared comprehension of which makes human communication more effective (Phillips, 2000: 22). Codes are also “historical” and, therefore, “cultural” (Barthes, 1977: 27), as such underpinning “the
customs, traditions, languages, art works, and scientific practices” of the world, through which is reflected our “universal need for meaning” (Danesi, 1999: 24).

Eco duly recognises the need to de-code signs: “The understanding of signs is not a mere matter of recognition (of a stable equivalence); it is a matter of interpretation” (1984: 43), adding that “no interpretant, in adjusting the sign interpreted, fails to change its borders to some degree” (1984: 44), which makes interpretation a subjective act. Because of their need for interpretation, Eco suggests that signs are propositional, which infers communicative intention, but also that a shared code must be present for the correct interpretations to be made (1984: 15–6). He adds that signs may be ‘intentional’ and/or ‘extensional’ (“this is equivalent to that” or “if this, then that”, respectively), with, for example, the hammer and sickle on a red flag being “equivalent to Communism” and a person carrying this emblem “probably a Communist” (1984: 18); examples which emphasise the importance of context (1984: 22). With this logic, Eco lists examples of signs as “navy flags, street signs, signboards, trademarks, labels, emblems, coats of arms, and letters” (1984: 16).

Corresponding to Eco’s evaluation of signs, Frye reasonably refers to: “The double nature of the symbol, as something completed both by its context and by its relation to something outside the world of words” (1987: 7), which attributes symbols with ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ qualities (1987: 6). Frye, however, believes that flags are not signs, but “metonymic symbols”, since they represent inherent social phenomena, like religious symbols also, which arouse the senses and emotions (1987: 4-5). Thus, by association, symbols are powerful and influential channels of communication and an inherent part of social systems, including those evoked in the making of films. Conversely, Berger distinguishes the semiological sign types as “metaphor”, “metonymy”, “icon”, “index” and “symbol” (1991: 124), although can only explain this distinction between symbol and metonymy by stating that: “In metonymy, then, the relationships are stronger than in symbols” (1991: 124). It may, therefore, be more reasonable to consider metaphor and metonymy as sub-classifications of the recognised sign types of ‘icon’ and ‘index’, respectively (see Sebeok, 1994). It should also be noted that Frye refers to ‘symbol’ where Eco uses the term ‘sign’, so a distinction between these phenomena needs to be made. Saussure used ‘symbol’ to refer to the arbitrary signs of language, and, for Peirce, the symbolic was equally based on learned conventions (the alphabet, flags, Morse Code, and traffic lights, for example) (Chandler, 2007: 36). Eco, on the other hand, defines symbols as signs that are “vaguely coded” (1984: 39), making their significance ambiguous and the relationship between signifier and signified unconventional (lions
symbolising strength, for example, despite having other characteristics that do not feature in the sign) (1984: 143–144). Eco further asserts that it is exactly this “vagueness” and “openness” of symbols that is appealing (1984: 130), which seems to attribute them with psychological purpose.

From Jung’s point of view as a psychiatrist interested in the symbolism of the unconscious, we use “symbolic terms” to stand for things that we “cannot define or fully comprehend” (1964: 21). For Jung, the symbolic is “existential” (unlike for Peirce) (Barthes, 1953: 103). He justly explains that religious symbols and beliefs, for example, bring meaning to people’s lives (Jung, 1964: 89), and, like Frye, believes that cultural symbols can elicit emotional reactions, making them an important part of our mental and social worlds (1964: 93). As Danesi elucidates: “Words in general are symbolic signs. But any signifier—an object, a sound, a figure—can be used symbolically. A cross can symbolize the concept “Christianity” ” (1999: 36). Cirlot also believes symbols to be man’s way of ordering and making sense of his experiences dating back to the Palaeolithic Age in primitive art (2001: location 173 of 9304). In his exploration of symbolism, Cirlot recognises the link between the cultural and the psychological, between rational, social man and philosophical, abstract thought. He speaks of the “symbolic function” of objects, which provides them with symbolic meaning, as opposed to “general meaning”, stating that any symbol (he uses ‘sword’ and ‘red’ as examples) can be split into its ‘real’ and ‘symbolic’ elements (2001: location 552 of 9304). Rather than ‘meanings’, however, Cirlot explains that signs might be attributed with different ‘values’ (2001: location 780 of 9304), proposing that the symbolic does not negate the denotative aspect, but adds another value (2001: location 120 of 9304). In this way, symbolism adds deeper connotational significance to signs, making Cirlot’s definition synonymous with the ideological order of signification (cultural, religious, psychological, political, and so on.).

In summary, despite the many different approaches to the understanding of signs (linguistic, philosophical, psychoanalytical, sociological, etc. (Chandler, 2007: 4) ), there is, upon analysis, much agreement and similarity in the use of terminology: that signs can have different signification or values; that they require interpretation and, therefore, rely upon context and the knowledge of shared codes to be understood; and that they form complex systems of messages. Moreover, although symbolism is considered by some to be a separate, primeval or subconscious phenomenon containing vague or hidden meanings, this in many ways correlates with the general use of the term ‘symbolic’ as a higher value of connotation (which is not to be confused with Peirce’s arbitrary sign type of ‘symbol’).
For the purposes of this research, which does not propose to elaborate further on semiotic theory, but simply to use this as a framework for the analysis of film and AD texts, recognised terminology will be used. In general usage, the “physical dimension” of a sign can be known as “signifier”, “representamen” or simply “sign” (Danesi, 1999: 11), the latter of which assumes “the idea of the whole” (Saussure, 1959: 66). But, as Barthes confirms, the “union” of signifier and signified to form a sign “is a paramount proposition, which one must always bear in mind, for there is a tendency to interpret sign as signifier” (1953: 104). Accordingly, the term sign shall be used in this work to reference the holistic form and its significance, with the terms signifier and signified as labels for “image” and “concept” respectively (Saussure, 1959: 67), although signifiers may sometimes be referred to by their form (the object, gesture, symbol, colour, etc.) or as propositions, icons, indexes and/or symbols; and signifieds may sometimes be referred to by meaning, signification, interpretation, value and so on. The terms symbolic and symbolism will be used in relation to relatively implicit sign values of ideological significance. This model will also be extended to include the contextual environments of signs, including paradigmatic and syntagmatic features, and, from Peirce’s triadic model, will recognise the existence of codes (rules) that enable the interpretation of signs in common terms. This terminology will be useful in the qualitative analysis and classification of semiotic content (primarily in chapter 4), although it is first to be determined how films are specifically coded and what types of signs are of relevance in film AD.

2.1.2. Signs in mainstream films

Narration is an inherent part of human history, used to bring definition and order to our lives (Danesi, 1999: 114). The visual narration of mainstream films, for example, is a way of representing and understanding people’s experiences in the world. In this, they bear an “iconic” resemblance to reality (Turvey, 1997: 433), although this reality is not real, but “realism” (Metz, 1974: 21) created from a selection of “preexisting” features representing ‘real’ life (Eco, 1979: 221). As Walton explains: “Nearly all films are representational; more specifically, they are visual or depictive representations, pictures” (1997: 60). Film narrative is never “unmediated”, therefore, but deliberately constructed (Lehman and Luhr, 2008: 20), with a basic plotline forming the underlying structure of “first level story” (Eco, 1979: 28), including the progression of different characters and events through time (Eco, 1979: 27–30). As structuralist analysis holds, narrative aims to involve the ‘reader’ as a story progresses through an initial phase of “disruption” to a build-up of conflicts, before a final resolution (Stafford, 2007: 81); stages that are presented via “a sequence of signifiers” (Metz, 1974: 19). However, stories, including films, are told in particular ways,
bearing the ideas and emotions of their authors (Mitry, 2000: 337). This can be referred to as “style” or “second meaning”, which carries “aesthetic or ideological” significance (Barthes, 1977: 17). In films, style may manifest itself in the composition and lighting of subjects within the film frame; the way the camera provides viewpoint; and in the way images are edited together to provide pace and create associations. Colour, light, sound and music, for example, are all signifiers (Berger, 1991: 27), which although often superfluous to the basic story, are necessary to express wider meanings to audiences. Style is, therefore, essential to the originality of often formulaic construction in mainstream films, which are produced from “a large ‘base’ of generic convention” (Phillips, 2000: 23). The inclusion of basic story elements, or “fabula” (Eco, 1979: 209), in film AD, thus forms the basis of a cohesive structure, although the addition of more stylistic features may create opportunities for visually-impaired audiences to generate further and deeper significance from content. In order to provide a framework for the identification and understanding of the visual components most commonly used in the creation of sign forms of connotational significance and for their analysis and categorisation in film AD, the significant use of structure and form in mainstream film is now considered.

Film narratives are often referred to as ‘texts’; expressly: “a network of different messages depending on different codes and working at different levels of signification” (Eco, 1979: 5). In an analysis of Ivan the Terrible (Eisenstein, 1944), for example, Barthes differentiated “three levels of meaning”: first, the “informational”, relating to what an image consists of in terms of story and character; second, the “symbolic”, which bears referential, thematic and historical significance, as intended by the “author”, by means of a “general lexicon of symbols”; and third, the “obtuse”, the meaning of which is compelling yet lies outside the spectator’s grasp (the suggestion of an actor’s wig or exaggerations in their make-up, for example) (1977: 52–55). It has already been established in film AD that the ‘informational’, or denotative, level of meaning is conveyed in the cohesive transfer of story elements. However, the inclusion of a “symbolic”, or connotative, secondary level of meaning, which infers intentional subtexts through the construction of visual signifiers, is yet to be established in the language of film AD.

In his analysis, Barthes believed the symbolic to be made “obvious” by way of “emphasis” (1977: 56). This does not correlate with the idea of an implicit, abstract or ‘open’ (Eco, 1984: 130) quality of symbolic form, as outlined in section 2.1.1, which seems more suitably related to Barthes' third, more “obtuse”, reading of the images, although the examples used also do not relate to the ideological level of signification (“myth” (Barthes, 1957)), or “third order” (Hartley (1982) referenced by Hayward, 2000: 322). Barthes does
admit that an "obtuse" reading may not even be warranted (1977: 53) and may command an unjust mockery of the images (1977: 57–58). This definition of a third order is, therefore, unreliable, and signifiers pertaining to an obtuse "counter-narrative" (Barthes, 1977: 63) would be more difficult to identify and interpret. The inclusion of ‘obtuse’ content in film AD would, therefore, be inappropriate, since modern mainstream films are not usually deconstructionist and such content would be overly-complex and confusing. A secondary, or symbolic, level of meaning, may be of value, however, and so it is of interest in this study how messages might be made more ‘obvious’ in film imagery and how these might be transferred to and received by audiences with VI. Ultimately, what can be determined from Barthes’ analysis is that the domain of texts, including film narrative, belongs to the signifier since significance is not readily divulged (Barthes, 1977: 158) and the ‘reader’ or spectator is required to form interpretations to make meaning. As such, the transfer of form, or ‘signifier’, would seem most appropriate in film AD, leaving the ‘signified’ for target spectators to determine. And so the successful transfer of creatively, thematically and culturally intentional content will, undoubtedly, impact upon the experience of works by target users.

Ultimately, “representation as sign is always partial” (Kress, 2003: 43), with the affordances of a sign being context-dependent with the potentiality for varied meanings, including in the broader contexts of sign systems in which signs draw significance from their relationships with other signs. Sign forms in cinema also consist of ‘relationships’ rather than “one image, one concrete object” (Mitry, 2000: 369). And, additionally, signs are “evolutionary” (Berger, 1991: 14), meaning that their signification can change diachronically to the point where they may become “naturalized” and no longer arbitrary (Barthes, 1953: 115). For example, the representation of good/bad cowboys by white/black clothing in traditional Hollywood Westerns has evolved into a widely understood and clichéd cinematic convention. In a similar way, it is worth investigating whether signs of different types (textual, technical, cultural, ideological, and so on) hold various potential for visually-impaired users of film AD to draw meanings from narrative contexts and the metanarrative resources of film. In ascertaining which signifying forms might be important to the connotational value of films and how these elements might be understood for the purpose of film AD, a brief analysis of film construction is necessary. This is broken down, below, into the commonly-referred to areas of genre; mise-en-scène (composition); camera techniques; and montage (editing); together with a look at how music and sounds are used in emphasis of visual events.
Genre

Film narratives can be grouped by text ‘type’, or genre, which is widely taken to mean the category that a film fits into depending on its “subject-matter”, “setting” and “narrative form” (Chandler, 2007: 160), although classification of mainstream films is flexible (Lehman and Luhr, 2008: 124) and evolving (Stafford, 2007: 104; Kress, 2003: 102). In semiotic terms, ‘genre’ is an holistic ‘signified’ with numerous signifiers used to express this; for example, the futuristic weaponry, clothing and technology employed in Star Trek, which, together, signify the science-fiction genre (Berger, 1991: 8). Genre is, therefore, deducible from recognisable conventions, in other words, through systems of codes, which, in mainstream culture, might include the formulaic systems of “spy stories […], westerns, science fiction adventures, […] girly fiction, horror stories, […] advertisements, sitcoms, and so on” (Berger, 1991: 25). A film’s genre is, therefore, “an important frame of reference” (Chandler, 2007: 189) pertaining to ‘first level story’. At this level, the basic genre classification of a film might be assumed to be carried across in film AD, which complements the relevant content of character dialogue via commonly-included descriptions of clothing, objects, location and action (see Piety, 2004, and Salway, 2007). However, it is still to be verified whether important connotative content related to genre is conveyed in film AD, for example, where many clues to a film’s outcomes may be made visually available in the genre signifiers of opening sequences during which title credits are often audio described. Moreover, on a more advanced level, film texts can be self-referential, reminding audiences of their nature as constructed medium, with Tarantino’s Pulp Fiction (1994) (Ward, 2003: 69) an example; or they can parody more traditional genres, like the ‘spaghetti’ westerns of the 1960s and 1970s. So, the signifiers of these films may be much more stylistic, and so less commonly found in film AD.

Mise-en-scène

Composition, or mise-en-scène, is a combination of interrelated visual messages pertaining to an “information value” (the position of paradigmatic and syntagmatic features); “salience” (the focalisation of elements); and “framing” (the joining or segmentation of elements) (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 177). The composition of a film can convey much to the audience semiotically, through the paradigmatic features of environment, body language, clothing, props, and so on; and the general mood and focus created through colour, lighting and framing. The arrangement of these features can also create connections (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 79), which provides the basis for analogy and, therefore, metaphor (Kress, 2003: 43). “Objects”, including characters, also
carry more than a “simple literal identity”, including discernible cultural meanings (Metz, 1974: 113). Moreover, stylistic “repetitions” or “motif” (Phillips, 2000: 36) can be used to create syntagmatic structure and connotation (the recurring rosebud motif in *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941), for example, which has been said to symbolise the childhood that the main protagonist lost). As Lehman and Luhr explain:

Motifs result from the repetition of visual images or sounds in a manner that forms a perceptible pattern. These patterns may or may not have thematic meaning (in Hollywood cinema they usually do), but they structure the film by ordering sights and sounds (2008: 35).

Another aspect of compositional structure is framing, which involves the use of “devices” to intentionally group or dislocate parts of an image to ‘propose’ a similar view of them (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 176). Framing is, thus, inferential, with mirrors, for example, “always ‘framing’ devices” (Eco, 1984: 220), used to bring focus, as in *The Talented Mr Ripley* (Minghella, 1999), in which issues with the main character’s personality and his identification with another persona are often reflected. Moreover, different shades of colour or light in the composition of a film can have “meaning potentials” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 233), which may be derived metonymically (by association); red, for example being associated with “passion” (Berger, 1991: 23) amongst other commonly-related signifieds. The manipulation of colour in black and white images or documentary footage can also be used to create intense realism, which serves an “expressive purpose”, although this may not always be used to express the same thing (Leibowitz, 1997: 331–2). Black and white film is also minimalistic and can involve viewers more profoundly in a plot (Monaco, 2009: location 1789 of 14542). Alternatively, Chaume’s understanding that black and white imagery can be intentionally used to “imply changes from the real world to the imaginary world, as in the case of *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939)”, is equally valid (2004: online). Lighting also, “whether ‘realistic’ and unnoticed, or highly atmospheric and ‘unrealistic’ provide connotations for all film shots” (Bignell, 2002: 193). Iconic images, such as shadows and reflections, that are usually produced naturally and, so might be considered “devoid of semiotic value” (Sebeok, 1994: 90), can be used connotatively in film to emphasises and infer psychological distortions or transformations, etc. In brief, the way in which films are composed through the use of “color, shape, and light” is significant to the spectator’s experience (Lehman and Luhr, 2008: 57). To neglect these aspects in audio description would, therefore, be to limit the expressive power of film for visually-impaired audiences.

Of course, what is expressed on screen can be shot in various ways by the camera.
Camera techniques

How the camera moves and captures its subjects is central to the “expressiveness” of filmmaking (Leibowitz, 1997: 330). Shot size, for instance, can be used to signify different things, with “close-ups signifying intimate or personal modes, medium shots a social mode and long shots an impersonal mode” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996 and Tuchman 1978, referenced by Chandler 2007: 193). Camera distance can, therefore, engender an audience’s emotional attachment to or separation from the subjects in view (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996 and Tuchman 1978, referenced by Chandler 2007: 193), just as in painting, where the foregrounding of subjects and objects can imply “a certain intimacy” (Berger, 1972: 97). Like the diversity of expression, the “infinitely variable system” (Mitry, 2000: 43), the range of shots and their respective signification in film are extensive. Low- or high-angled shots, for example, can give the impression of a character’s status, such as an upward pan, which can make a subject seem small or weak (Berger, 1991: 27); or zooming in to an extreme close-up may emphasise a character’s face, which, again, suggests “intimacy” (Berger, 1991: 26) or emotional state, whereas, conversely, fading out can signify the end of something (Berger, 1991: 27), and long or tracking shots, although establishing context (Berger, 1991: 26), can hold metaphorical significance (the hostile desert in Lawrence of Arabia (Lean, 1962), for example, or the lonely landscapes of Paris, Texas (Wenders, 1984) ). The camera can also be thought of as ontological (studying the nature of its subjects) and, therefore, as subjective, constructing a particular view of the world by showing a character’s points of focus and, as such, his thoughts (Kawin, 1978: 7). Camera angle can also suggest a subjective view point or “attitudes towards represented participants” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 129). Finally, slow motion capture can also be classified as an expressive device of camera technique. For Baudrillard, slow motion film is both “poetic” and ‘seductive’, which allows something “the time to be missed” before it disappears into the void of time (1988: 163). Sequences of film shown in this way propose indexical meanings derived from the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of significant events, such as the slow motion action of explosions, which Monaco describes as “symphonic celebrations of a material world” (2009: location 1514 of 14542). Ultimately, how the camera is used to express meaning is an important signifying cue for audio describers, but this may not necessarily be included in AD texts, where describing technical effects might detract from an audience’s immersion in a story and, as such, from the “perceptible reality” of film narrative (Mitry, 2000: 14). How the signifying forms of camera technique might otherwise be enabled in audio description without drawing attention to the construction of film, therefore, remains to be established.
What is seen in one shot may be either continued to the next, juxtaposed with contrasting imagery, or events may move on completely. How a narrative ‘flows’ in continuity from one shot to the next is achieved through editing (Phillips, 2000: 39).

**Montage**

Montage is the editing together of shot sequences in films (Monaco, 2009: location 2002 of 14542), which helps to condense the action and link events. The temporality of film narrative is, therefore, “structured by intricate semantic and rhythmic patterns of editing” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 265), which dictates the path spectators follow and directs them “towards a world of causality” (Kress, 2003: 4). Linkage also prompts the spectator to form “mental connections”, which can “create drama, particularly suspense, through providing or withholding information” (Phillips, 2000: 43). The assemblage of shots may be chronological, asynchronous, in flash-forward or flashback, cross-cut to parallel action, in deep focus, or a montage of juxtaposed images (Hayward, 2000: 94–97), and are often accentuated by the ‘optical’ devices of “fades, wipes, dissolves, freezes, and masks” (Monaco, 2009: location 2168 of 14542). Of juxtaposition, Hayward clarifies that meaning results from the collision and conflict of images (2000: 94–97), which, in terms of visual aesthetics, infers that montage is more about the expression of meaning than the logical presentation of a story (Mitry, 2000: 68). Juxtapositions are syntagmatic combinations (Barthes, 1953: 125), similes, whose signifying units are connotational. Cross cutting to simultaneous action also gives the illusion of a film’s ‘world’ and adds layers to the plot that maintain the interest of audiences. Moreover, flashbacks, as indicative of dreams and memories in film, are often indexical of a character’s motivation or state of mind. Montage is, therefore, a crucial consideration in film AD to ensure the sequential understanding of the action, but this may also propose connotative relationships in the imagery and, as such, a fuller appreciation of form.

**Music and sounds**

A film’s soundtrack (dialogue, music and sound effects) has semiotic functionality also. As Bignell states: “Sound is also represented by means of signs […]. The film audience receives aural signifiers which are linked to mental concepts, signifieds like musical chords or speech sounds” (2002: 193). The musical score, for example, is indexical “connoting the emotional register of a sequence” and signifying character emotion (Bignell, 2002: 194), whilst creating mood and atmosphere (Baldry and Thibault, 2005: 51). In this way, the structures of music can “evoke feelings” (Danesi, 1999: 171),
reinforce the visual signifiers or add clues to what is not visually apparent. For example, a recurring track (a musical motif) linked to a particular character, may be used to indicate his or her presence, a link which is activated by way of “some arbitrariness in the relationship between the connotative signifier (the melody) and the connotative significate (the character)” (Metz, 1974: 110). Kivy also asserts that music fills in for a part of the “human expression which the ‘speaking effigies’ cannot provide” (1997: 317), and, in fact, film music is “so highly codified and conventionalized" that it can actually encourage audience understanding (Smith, 1996: 236–237). Smith, therefore, believes the function of film music to be semiotic and psychological: “Like a photographic caption, music harnesses the elusive visual signifier, and assures us of a safely channelled signified” (1996: 234): dramatic music signalling a dramatic event, for example. It is possible, however, that, in the same way that the “inevitable” adjective is wholly inadequate in the interpretation of music (Barthes, 1977: 179), the meaning of film music may not be so easily defined, which reduces its semiotic reliability significantly. Moreover, Smith believes film music to be “subordinated to the film’s diegesis in a manner which renders it inaudible” (1996: 230), which suggests a subliminal level of operation. It may well be that film spectators ‘switch off’ from the extra-diegetic music to a certain extent, although the balance of audio in mainstream films in favour of dramatic soundtracks may often preclude this phenomenon. Nonetheless, the prevalence and intentionality of mainstream film music is accepted, so much so that even “the perceived absence of music itself has an expressive power” (in Hitchcock’s The Birds (1963), for example) (Kivy, 1997: 325). This underlines the value of sound signifiers in emphasis of imagery and bears implications for the interpretation of images in audio description, including whether sounds are sufficiently significant without the accompaniment of AD. It must be borne in mind, however, that the interpretation of sound and music is often ‘loose’ or even abstract. Bacharach’s song Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head, for example, written for Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (George Roy Hill, 1969), is played during a romantic bicycle sequence in bright morning sunshine. Thus, the usefulness of sound signifiers in the processing of film AD would need to be tested.

The above mentioned signifiers of genre, mise-en-scène, camera techniques, montage, and music and sounds, are part of the ‘specialist’ (although fairly “easy”) cultural coding system of film and have a purpose outside the purely iconic representation of situations (Eco referenced by Metz, 1974: 113). Of course, these may represent different things to different people in different contexts, or have "different meanings even for the same viewer at different times" (Lehman and Luhr, 1999 In Orero, 2012: 16). The individual emotions of a viewer may also have a rhetorical influence on the perception of a film as
“inferences, appraisals, judgements, hypotheses, etc.” are formed during viewing (Plantinga, 1997: 378–379). But meanings in a syntagmatic structure are not limitless, since “the universe of discourse” has boundaries (Eco, 1979: 189). As Barthes points out, the grouping of signs is “free”, but not unmediated (1953: 131), and, equally, the signifiers of mainstream film are combined within the boundaries of film and social cultural, which limits their ultimate understanding. As Chandler reasonably points out: “Codes help to simplify phenomena in order to make it easier to communicate experiences [which] helps to limit their possible meanings” (2007: 157). Rodriguez further observes that response to film is conditioned by socio-ideological programming (1997: 260). And this occurs within contexts, codes and conventions that are also temporal, and so the value of semiotic content depends on prevailing social norms (Bignell, 2002: 196–197; Lehman and Luhr, 2008: 177). Meaning is, thus, conditioned by anteriority: “there is already a text, a network of textual referrals to other texts [...] the presumed interiority of meaning is already worked upon by its own exteriority” (Derrida, 1972: 28–29). Exteriority, or “intertextuality”, implies an accumulation of knowledge that enables a film to be ‘read’ by means of textual conventions, although also permitting viewers opportunities to “play with a range of meanings” (Stafford, 2007: 83–84). In common usage, intertextuality can, therefore, refer to “the use of texts (consciously or unconsciously) of materials from other, previously created texts”, as, for example, in parody (Berger, 1991: 20).

Many practices in mainstream filmmaking have become “stable through convention and repetition over innumerable films” (Metz, 1974: 101), a conventionalisation that makes them both familiar and, to a certain extent, predictable and understandable to audiences (Bignell, 2002: 200). In the same way, “the code of the connoted system is very likely constituted [...] by a stock of stereotypes (schemes, colours, graphisms, gestures, expressions, arrangements of elements)” (Barthes, 1977: 18). As Barthes explains: “connotation drawn from knowledge is always a reassuring force–man likes signs and likes them clear” (1977: 29). The world of conventional filmmaking appears to understand that relationships exist between the viewer and the image on conscious or unconscious levels (Hammett, 1997: 244) and actually “[plays] into the spectator’s perceptual and cognitive inclinations and habits” (Peterson, 1996: 108). During the act of viewing, the spectator may be unaware of this process taking place, since the mental structures of association, or codes, that we use to interpret signs (Berger, 1991: 23) suggest an often simultaneous and subconscious interpretation of common codes (Chandler, 2007: 157). As Chandler explains: “Once we know the code, decoding it is almost automatic and the code retreats to invisibility” (2007: 166). Such conventional codes of film construction include the “social”, “textual” and “mass media”, which relate to the interpreter’s
knowledge of “(1) the world (social knowledge); (2) the medium and the genre (textual knowledge); [and] (3) the relationship between (1) and (2) (modality judgements)” (Chandler, 2007: 149–150). These might include character dialogue, body language and facial expressions (social); genre, narrative, titles, captions, subtitles, credits and diegetic signs, such as street signs (textual); or composition, camera and editing techniques (media). Bordwell justly surmises, therefore, that: “If cinema does have ‘codes’", then they are of a “very easily acquired sort” since “cinema is full of […] easily learned visual effects” (1996a: 95), although it remains to be understood whether such ‘easy’ (and predominantly visual) codes carry equivalent meaning potential for both sighted and visually-impaired audiences.

In short, films are not created by accident, some are even considered “works of art” (Gaut, 1997: 153), which emphasises their nature as expression systems, although created with intent as opposed to spontaneous artworks. And whilst ‘Intentionalism’ in film is denied by some critics (and not all aspects of film need be intentional or explainable anyway) (Gaut, 1997: 150–153), a filmmaker’s control over events, actors, camera movement, and so on, is undoubtedly related to intention (Gaut, 1997: 157). And although some lines of critical theory also judge that artistic works do not convey themes or messages (Wilson, 1997: 226), the level of technical manipulation in films would seem to indicate a strong intention to express something to audiences. Here, Lehman and Luhr affirm that the prevailing meaning of a film is that which “filmmakers and publicists intend. Audiences are encouraged to respond to the film in the way projected by the filmmakers, distributors, and exhibitors” (2008: 394). Notwithstanding the many other schools of thought (including formalist and illusionist), together with “Post-theory”, which called for an end to all-encompassing “grand theory” (Stafford, 2007: 83), there has been much interest in the cultural meanings of film (Kracauer, Benjamin, Brecht, Gilbert Seldes, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Gregory Bateson, for example (Bordwell, 1996b: 9) ), the breadth of which appears, in itself, to support the presence of a culturally-communicative value.

But although visually-impaired audiences are part of the same society as sighted spectators and, therefore, familiar with social codes and conventions, film theory can only partially explain how they might comprehend films. It remains to be understood, therefore, whether the codes and conventions of mainstream films are as ‘easily-acquired’ by visually-impaired spectators via film AD.
2.1.3. Cognition and visual impairment

Endeavouring, within the limits of a visual understanding to comprehend blindness, we need first to look at the process as being different not less (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011: prologue). Differences in processing and comprehension might, for instance, ensue from the delivery of information in the verbal mode as opposed to the visual mode. Differences may occur in learning rates, language use and communication preferences, and also in an individual’s requirements in the context of their sight condition, age of onset, and age group. Each of these factors is considered in this section with a view to anticipating the needs of the visually-impaired spectator, with the ultimate aim of understanding how the connotative features of mainstream films might be received and understood by this group.

Blindness is not homogeneous (Warren, 1984: 298). Different types and degrees of visual impairment result from ‘peripheral’ damage to the eye or to part of the nervous system between the eye and the brain, often resulting from cataract, glaucoma, squint, toxocariasis or nystagmus (Woolfson, 1991: 81–82), with cataract (47.9%), glaucoma (12.3%) and Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) (8.7%) the most common causes globally (World Health Organisation, 2011 (a): online). Of the World’s 161 million blind and visually-impaired people (World Health Organisation, 2011 (b): online), there is an estimated 2 million people of different ages affected by sight loss in the UK (about 1 person in 30), of which AMD is the most prevalent (RNIB, 2012: online), and this number may double by 2050 (RNIB, 2012: online). There are no precise statistics on the number of people living with sight conditions in the UK, however, as many do not formerly register themselves as blind, and it is also difficult to ascertain the number of people using AD (Ofcom, 2011: personal communication). The potential users of AD also “do not fall neatly into homogeneous groups”, with some being blind and others visually-impaired to different degrees, although the majority having been sighted previously (Ofcom, 2010: 9). Audio describers are, therefore, advised to “take account of the fact that most potential users of audio description will have some sight, or will have had sight at some stage” (Ofcom, 2000: 12). The age of people with VI also varies, although most are older. But no matter what their age or sight condition, it is accepted that the majority will not be able to fully access onscreen information, including gestures and actions important to understanding (Ofcom, 2000: 6).

Just as blindness is not homogenous, people living with visual-impairment are individuals, with their own knowledge, skills and experiences. Visually-impaired children, for example, like normally-sighted children, develop and learn at different rates. And even though some
‘lags’ in development may be attributed to a lack of vision, which restricts the range of learning experiences (Woolfson, 1991: 78), for those children without additional needs, language development may be no different to that of sighted children (Warren, 1984: 278). Improvements in many experience-related areas can also occur with age and even the adult brain can change as a result of experience (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011: 3). Adventitiously blind people may also retain visual memory (Sylvester, 1913; Schlaegel, 1953; and Worchel (1951) referenced by Warren, 1984: 147–149), whereas congenitally blind people may typically form impressions “in tactual terms” (Worchel (1951) referenced by Warren, 1984: 149), creating mental pictures from the features of form and texture (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011: 76).

Moreover, in addition to the eyes and the neural network, the brain plays a role in the processing of information (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011: 2), so, where cognitive function is intact, the ability of visually-impaired individuals to create mental representations is not inconceivable (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011: 1). The “semantic knowledge” of visually-impaired people is also suffused with visual form, such as the colour of objects (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011: 2), which can find meaning associatively (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011: 205). Similarly, metaphors have been found by psychologists to “involve a special kind of mental imagery” that people with visual impairment are able to construct (Danesi, 1999: 97). In short, a person's individual interpretation of what is perceived is influenced by the shared codes of language, meaning that sighted and visually-impaired people can understand the world in similar ways (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011: 205).

In applying these understandings to the perception of films, there is no reason to believe that visually-impaired people could not, whether from memory, tactual experience, or semantic knowledge and a shared use of language codes, understand the signifying values presented and assign similar meanings to sighted people, where equitably presented in AD. It was once felt to be the case that blindness blocked the “reception of the signifier”, inhibiting the understanding of film language (Metz, 1974: 72). But with the inclusion of signifying content in AD, which allows sufficient scope for comprehension on a range of levels, reception is no longer suppressed. Moreover, (as discussed in section 2.1.1), the linguistic signified is conceptual: a psychological, as opposed to concrete, representation (Saussure, 1959: 11; Barthes, 1953: 108). This means that signification in film AD does not depend upon a physical referent (or Peirce’s “object”), but only upon signifying language, or words (“representamen”), together with a set of familiar codes to enable interpretation, as activated by context (“interpretant”). Cognitive function is engaged via the predominant sense mode of hearing in AD, which is sufficient to
conceptualise what something means, or as Danesi (1999: 23) puts it of semiotic analysis, what something “represents”. In cognitive psychology, it is believed that the decoding of film texts offers people opportunities for understanding and learning via the synthesis of information, including the deciphering of clues and making connections (Stafford, 2007: 84). So cognitive processing in itself holds value, with representation on a symbolic level, for example, having a defining purpose in people’s lives (Jung, 1964: 89) (see section 2.1.1).

Moreover, (as outlined in section 2.1.2), Smith’s suggestion that film music has a semiotic and psychological function in anchoring visual signifiers to reliable signifieds (1996: 234), has implications in film AD, since the emphasis of secondary level meaning in a soundtrack may preclude the need for further AD, although this would need to be tested. But, Smith’s assertion that film music is “inaudible”, bearing only a secondary presence to the diegetic world of the narrative (1996: 230), may not necessarily apply to visually-impaired audiences due to the heightened aural perception that is commonly associated with blindness (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011: 5), although it may simply be the case that visually-impaired people pay closer attention to sounds (Ransom, 1984; location 514 of 1035). It, therefore, remains to be understood how the music and sounds of mainstream films might affect the visually-impaired spectator’s decoding experience in the activation of signs.

In summary, visual impairment is diverse, although with intact cognitive function, many visually-impaired people possess the capacity to construct mental pictures (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011: 203), whether based on visual memory or haptic and auditory experience or as a result of semantic understanding (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011: 76). There is, therefore, no evidence to suggest that visually-impaired viewers with processing capacity cannot successfully produce deeper levels of meaning from films through inference and evaluation. Film AD texts that do not incorporate important semiotic features for reasons of keeping things simple, are, therefore, unjustified, incomplete, and ultimately inequitable for users.

2.2. Audio Description Today

This section will investigate whether provision is made in existing legislation and guidelines for the appropriate adaptation of film media in AD, including the transfer of stylistic elements of thematic and cultural value (2.2.1). An analysis of the theoretical perspectives concerning AD will also be made to verify whether current contributions in
this field include theories on the semiotic analysis of films (2.2.2), and where any issues or gaps are discovered, translation models will be suggested for the transference of visual form to AD (2.2.3). The objective of this analysis is to understand whether the wider meanings of mainstream film are considered in AD, whether there is any reason why this may not be incorporated as standard, and how sign transfer of equitable and determinable value might take place.

2.2.1. Current legislation and guidelines

The European Commission and UK legislators acknowledge people with differences in the community by making provision for them in anti-discrimination law. In support of legislation, UK guidelines on how to make AV material accessible are also provided. Thus, aside from the call for navigational menus, AD in the UK could be said to fulfil the sociocultural need of access-for-all as outlined in the European Union's Audiovisual Media Services Directive (2010: online):

The right of persons with a disability and of the elderly to participate and be integrated in the social and cultural life of the Union is inextricably linked to the provision of accessible audiovisual media services. The means to achieve accessibility should include, but need not be limited to, sign language, subtitling, audio-description and easily understandable menu navigation.

However, this directive makes only general provision for accessibility rights. In the Communications Act (2003), Section 303, the British Government outlines its own requirement for access services of AV media, being to “promote their understanding and enjoyment” by those with “sensory impairment” (Legislation.gov.uk: online). The Act charges the Office of Communications (Ofcom) with the publication of and adherence to a Code providing statistical requirements for access services on television (2011: personal communication). However, Ofcom’s Content Policy Executive in the Content, International and Regulatory Development team, has clarified that Ofcom’s control is limited to TV: “We do not have any access service powers or duties in relation to cinema VOD or any other audio visual form” (2011: personal communication). The focus of legislation is, therefore, on televised broadcasts and, although these would include scheduled feature films, there is no clarification in respect of theatrical (cinematic) and DVD/Blu-ray® releases. When asked if there are any controls on AD for film in the UK, Ofcom’s representative explained that this is unlikely since “there is no one in overall charge of this area”, but that “best practice guidance attached to the TV Code” may also be being applied to both TV and film by the small number of companies involved in AD production (Ofcom, 2011: personal
communication). Thus, although Ofcom is aware of the companies producing AD in the UK (being primarily London-based agencies), it does not govern them: “the production relationship is between the broadcaster and whoever they chose to contract the production of their access services out to (some broadcasters produce their services in house but these are the exception to the rule)” (Ofcom, 2011: personal communication). The same is most likely the case for film AD, since the same agencies are involved in providing access services for both televisual and film media. Legislation on media access services for television is also largely quantitative not qualitative. As a result, AD is not a standardised service (Orero, 2007: 112).

In place in the UK is the ITC *Guidance on Standards for Audio Description* (drafted in 1995 by broadcaster and AD professional, Veronika Hyks, and revised in 2000 by senior audio describer, James O’Hara), which has been controlled by Ofcom since its superseding of the ITC in 2003. These guidelines offer practical direction on the fundamental technical, writing and voicing principles required in the scripting and recording of effective AD for different genres and audiences. For example, audio describers are advised to include the “‘when’, ‘where’, ‘who’ and ‘what’” of a programme (Ofcom, 2000: 14) and to offer clues in a “subtle way, because that is how the sighted viewer will see it” (Ofcom, 2000: 15). Describers are also asked to keep things simple so as not to overburden the viewer with a lot of non-essential information that could be distracting, irritating or tiresome to listen to (Ofcom, 2000: 10). Conversely, however, it is mentioned in the guidelines that “most people interviewed throughout Audetel’s work asked for the audio description to give as much detail as possible” (Ofcom, 2000: 6). Moreover, the avoidance of technical terms is recommended in the guidelines, since although “it is important to try to understand why a director has chosen to film a sequence in a particular way”, terms like “in close-up, pan across, mid-shot, crane-shot etc., may not mean anything” to audiences (Ofcom, 2000: 5). The guidelines include a ‘technical’ example: “The picture fades” (Ofcom, 2000: 21), but no further advice is given on terms that might be understood by the majority of viewers. In a subsequent article, Hyks asserts that: “Technical expressions demand careful consideration, but the describer needs to keep the language simple” (2005: 8). It is certainly accepted that many technical expressions may be too specialised to be easily understood and enjoyed by the general public, and that the use of such terms also traverses a boundary between the worlds of fiction and production. However, as outlined in section 2.1.3, the processing of less simplistic (although not necessarily technical) terms, i.e., those pertaining to elements of the narrative other than ‘first level story’ is within the capability of viewers with VI, whether through knowledge or association.
The guidelines’ recommendation that colours be included in AD is a first sign that the inclusion of elements that may be processed non-literally by audiences may not necessarily be complex; notably that:

Green is fresh, the colour of renewal and nature in spring. Red is the colour of fire and heat, exuberant and overt, blue is more reserved, yellow is the colour of the sun and ripe corn, etc. A person wearing bright colours is making a personality statement, wanting to be seen. Someone else wearing black may be being dramatic, mysterious or sad, depending on the situation. If the grass is brown, it may have been deprived of rain. And so on. Colours have meaning and should be described.

(Ofcom, 2000: 21)

Moreover, the ITC guidelines advise to “find a form of words to conjure up the intention of the scene” (Ofcom, 2000: 22), and, of feature films, “to be true to the film in mood and style” (Ofcom, 2000: 24). Unfortunately, there is no guidance on how to do this other than referring to (although not relying upon) the screenplay or script (Ofcom, 2000: 24). A background interest and experience in visual media, which may help in this respect, is notably absent from the general skill set outlined in the guidelines, however: “An audio describer needs good writing skills, a clear, pleasant and expressive voice and a thorough knowledge of the needs of a visually impaired audience” (Ofcom, 2000: 6), even though a background in media translation might be considered essential in writing for film. In short, reference on how to include the more sophisticated elements of films (issuing from genre, mise-en-scène, subjective camera, montage, and so on), is not made in these guidelines, although, in fairness, the focus of the Audetel study that initiated these guidelines was on televisual media. Similarly, the RNIB’s own guidelines for improved access and the BBC guidelines for television viewing, offer professional audio describers useful insights, although are limited in terms of film viewing (see BBC: online; RNIB, 2013). When asked if there were any plans to revise the Guidance on Standards for Audio Description, Ofcom’s representative explained that the current Code on Television Access Services, introduced in 2003, is “periodically updated” (Ofcom, 2011: personal communication), which is taken to mean that the Code has superseded the original ITC guidelines. A reading of the Code, which consolidates quantitative targets on the audio description of television programmes, along with those of other access services, with a more concise set of best practice guidelines, adds nothing further in respect of film AD other than to mention that “‘filmic’ terms such as camera angles should not be used”, and, more generally, that only what is visible on screen should be described, avoiding subjectivity (in the use of adverbs, for example) (Ofcom, 2010: 14). As such, guidelines “are just that–guidelines”, the basic
principles of audio description, so individual products, including films, will not always fit with the conventions (Greening, 2013: personal communication).

The call for the UK guidelines to be revised when referring to film AD, therefore, appears misguided. For example, in his analysis of film AD, Finbow believes that the UK guidelines are “too prescriptive” and “in need of revision” (2010: 227), and so he seems unaware that they were written primarily for television access (despite a great deal of general advice) and have since been absorbed into Ofcom’s TV Code. Orero too believes that: “There is a need to create ADs which are the result of a deeper analysis, understanding and interpretation of films, rather than follow existing guidelines which insist on a superficial reading” (2012: 25). But, more sympathetically, Braun outlines that “the publication of guidelines for AD in some countries (e.g. UK, Spain, Germany) has been an important step towards providing practising audio describers with a basis for their challenging and creative task”, although acknowledging that they do not explain why some AD is better than others (2008: 2). To provide a more consistent and qualitative experience in AD, Vercauteren believes that there should be an increase in the availability of training courses, as well as a set of international guidelines (2007: 140). The flexibility of AD to evolve as a creative skill integrated with filmmaking and evolving ICT, is important, and so it is accepted that audio describers may well be sought for their media-reading capabilities in the future (Orero, 2007: 118). Orero also believes that: “Audio describers should follow a course in film language, grammar, syntax and its readings” so as to produce “richer and more meaningful readings which will do justice to the visual film’s narrative [sic] and its intentions” (2012: 26). However, an international set of rules might limit the opportunity for the emergence of new approaches, with a need for guideline changes to be approved by an appointed body representative of a number of different countries. This could also limit the cultural diversity of AD writers, who might find it difficult to work within a global format. Rather, film AD may benefit from having its own set of localised guidelines and training, founded both on past experience and current theories in AV translation.

At present, agencies do not necessarily recognise the need to employ audio describers who are formally qualified in media translation. So, although certified courses are available, qualified describers do not find work easily and it is often freelancers or in-house staff who are ‘trained up’ to script and voice AD (Orero, 2007: 118). To assist in the writing of AD (with character names, for example), film companies will sometimes supply the post-production houses with scripts (Ofcom, 2000: 9; Greening, 2013: personal communication). But shooting and dialogue scripts are sometimes inaccurate, and it is not uncommon for nothing extra to be supplied with the film file (Greening, 2013: personal
communication). Beyond the requisite for AD, there is also little input from film companies in the production of the AD content that is to be attached to their material. Moreover, the often poor quality of prints supplied, together with onscreen “spoilers” (logos and text), which are designed to help prevent piracy, may cause a lot of detail to be missed by describers (Greening, 2013: personal communication). This means that despite the existence of translators with media training and of persons with first-hand knowledge and resources concerning the particular film to be worked on, as well as the availability of digital ICT and the ingestion of media files into specialist AV software, the conditions in post-production have a limiting effect on the work produced.

The deadlines in agency post-production processes are also restrictive (Hyks, 2005) with film AD produced as quickly as possible (the AD for the theatrical release of Casino Royale (Campbell, 2006), for example, was reportedly completed in one weekend). However, short deadlines have little to do with cost since AD involves a “standard fee” (Greening, 2013: personal communication). Rather, it is the late delivery of material to the agency prior to release, ensuing from a real concern over piracy, that limits the time available for scripting and recording (Greening, 2013: personal communication). In some circumstances, late delivery can also lead to agencies using several audio describers to work on one film to enable a deadline to be met (Greening, 2013: personal communication). As the ITC Guidelines state: “A two-hour film may take up to sixty hours to prepare” (Ofcom, 2000: 12), which would necessitate a team of staff working simultaneously on a feature in a limited number of days. Of team working in translation, Nida confirms that translators may divide the work equally, but that the engagement of individuals with “related and complementary qualifications” is preferable to a situation in which everyone is presumed to be “expert in all fields” (1964: 154). But in the “real world” of AD production, although describers may be expert in particular areas, being exceptional at describing war films, for example, there is no time for such specialisation if there is only a week to do everything (Greening, 2013: personal communication). Additionally, not all agencies have time for quality editing, although general “rec checks” are made on all films, whilst, in the meantime, another film may have arrived to audio-describe (Greening, 2013: personal communication). Where there also used to be the opportunity to make amendments to the AD (paid for by film distributors for cinema release and passed on to home entertainment who pay for its reconfiguration and mixing for DVD), there is no longer time to do this since DVDs are being created simultaneously (Greening, 2013: personal communication). Of course the prioritisation of content in the verbal mode of film AD presents an additional constraint on time, because, unlike “visual signifiers”, which offer multiple and multidimensional propositions concurrently, “auditory signifiers” are
time-dependent, being formed one after the other in a “chain” (Saussure, 1959: 69). Integration to the auditory channel of film narrative, therefore, restricts the timeframes in which AD can appropriately be placed.

In view of this situation, Greening believes that: “There will never be a perfect audio description [...] The way that there’s never a perfect book—you often find a spelling mistake in a published book. You’ve not got time to watch the film all the way through before you start to work on it”, although she stresses that: “Describers are doing the absolute best they can under extraordinarily difficult circumstances” (2013: personal communication). In truth, limitations in legislation, guidelines and post-production practices are not the fault of audio describers. But, these restrictions do not entirely account for choices made or limitations in terms of language style and content. A look at academic theory in this area may, therefore, clarify whether provisions are or could be made in respect of semiotic transfer.

2.2.2. Perspectives in AD transfer

Since the content of film AD in the UK appears to be largely controlled by the practices of a small number of London agencies and is seemingly uninfluenced by filmmakers or consumers, each of whom might have a potential interest in how AD adapts the original material, there is scope for discussion on how AD is approached at present. This section focuses on theoretical perspectives in AD with the aim of determining any trends in AD transfer or issues that may affect the incorporation of the signifying content of film.

Initial theoretical approaches to AD have been largely corpus-based. For example, from an early study of the AD of 4 films, including Ridley Scott’s ‘Gladiator’ (2000), Piety (2004) listed a taxonomy of AD representations, namely: “appearance” (relating to characters, things or settings); “action” (of someone or something moving or transforming); “position” (location); “reading” (of signs or subtitles, for example); “indexical” (to identify a speaker or sound); “viewpoint” (to mark a change in scene, for example); and “state” (providing information that is not visually apparent, such as names). Salway had similar outcomes in his analysis of the “idiosyncratic features” of AD from 91 films, finding high instances of words concerning “appearance, action, position, reading, indexical, viewpoint and state” (2007: 153). From this analysis, Salway deemed character “appearance”, “focus of attention”, and “interpersonal interactions”, as well as “changes of location of characters and objects” and “emotional states” to be important (2007: 160). Out of context, it is difficult to determine whether the word forms in these categories actively participate in the
production and processing of signs. However, both Piety's and Salway's studies indicate a strong focus on characters in film AD, meaning that other sources of expression, including the aesthetic forms of signs, might be marginalised. Thus, if film AD were to actively incorporate the signifying values of signs, proposing secondary level meanings to audiences in the verbal mode, these models may need to be re-evaluated, since new methods tackling the multimodality of films on a variety of levels could produce quite different results.

Films are “multimodal” as opposed to “mono-modal” (Braun, 2008), and information is transferred intermodally (from images to words) in AD; which is a process of “intersemiotic” translation or “transmutation” (Jakobson, 1959: 114), the “transference of a message from one kind of symbolic system to another” (Nida, 1964: 4). Haig rightly points out that this is a process of cultural translation, surmising that a film, its space, images and soundtrack are constructed “cultural events” carrying visual and verbal messages to audiences, which, to be appropriately communicated via AD, need to be analysed and decoded by audio describers (or the “audiodescribing subject”) (2006: online). However, drawing upon theories in pictorial semiotics to emphasise the incompatibilities between visual and verbal language, Haig outlines the inherent difficulty in creating verbal descriptions from film images, with spatial and temporal disparities adding further to this complication (2006: online). She additionally questions whether the “audiodescribing subject” can draft objectively or whether s/he is culture-bound to social norms and, as a result, subconsciously attaching signifieds to visual signifiers according to his or her own cultural beliefs (2006: online).

Ibanez believes that subjectivity is, in fact, central in film AD: “Every sound, every camera move, every glance in a film forces the describer to decide whether it is important enough to be included in the final text” (2010: 152). It is acknowledged that these signifiers may present audio describers with important clues to meaning, but, this is not to say that these are necessarily taken up. It is accepted, though, that judgement is active in AD (Hyks, 2005; Braun, 2008), since transmutation is a semiotic process that requires decisions based on the interpretation of signs within coded contexts (as outlined in section 2.1.1). Conversely, American audio describer Joel Snyder believes that: “Qualitative judgments get in the way of a good AD, since they constitute a subjective interpretation on the part of the describer and are therefore unnecessary and unwanted” (2011: 195). This argument in favour of an objective, “What You See Is What You Say” approach, is confusing, however, since Snyder equally believes that audio describers should “use language which helps people see vividly, and even see beyond what is readily apparent” (2011: 195); in
other words, a literal approach. Vinay and Darbelnet believe that literal translation lacks “intellectual challenge” since it involves explicit transfer from source to target language (1995: 87); so, whilst the literal method may be advocated by some translation theorists (Munday, 2008: 45), and is even necessary in film AD in some instances (in the naming of places, objects and subjects, for example), this method may constitute a less creative strategy overall. Audio description is not a running commentary and the objective approach is also out of line with Snyder’s own understanding of AD as an art form (2011: 192). His belief also that “the best audio describer is sometimes referred to as a ‘verbal camera lens’, able to objectively recount visual aspects of an exhibition or audiovisual programme” (2011: 195), is contradictory, since the camera is not, in fact, objective, but subjective in its choice of focus, as discussed in section 2.1.2. Moreover, the “myth of ‘objectivity’”, which limits the signifier to a denotational signified, that is, “to a precise reality” (Baudrillard, 1988: 88), does not take into account the “cultural context” of a translator’s life (Nida, 1964: 145), nor “the potential emotional involvement of the translator in the message” (Nida, 1964: 155).

In more creative terms, Holland suggests that good AD is integrated with what is being described, creating a relationship between the viewer and the “whole” of what is viewed (2009: 184). And with the progressive view of AD as an “artistic experience”, he justifiably argues that the description of AD as an “enabling service” is inappropriate, since this is based on language associated with discrimination and disability rather than on creative talent (2009: 183–184). Piety notes also that certain approaches in AD could either provide or deprive the viewer of “important cognitive opportunities” (2004), and Haig is convinced that the organised onscreen space could more appropriately be translated into verbal forms for visually-impaired people (2006: online). For Haig, working as a media creative with visual impairment, current practice in AD is based on broadcasting processes that involve neither a cultural appreciation of the “viewing subject” nor a first-hand view of what it means to be visually-impaired. She expounds that the medical rather than the cultural view of disability is predominant so that the viewer is stereotyped as “docile” (2006: online). This is assumptive, however, since an absence of persons with VI from the process does not mean that the needs of the target audience are not considered. Haig further believes that current practice is based on the academic norms of media translation courses, which she believes exclude film studies from their list of course entry requirements, although this is not true of all establishments; the University of Surrey, for example. As noted previously, many students of AV media courses do not gain employment in post-production houses and so cannot be held responsible for these issues. However, the essence of Haig’s point that professional audio describers may need
to review the way in which they work due to inconsistencies in the content provided, is certainly worth considering.

Udo and Fels believe that to provide users with a similar experience in AD, film “stimuli”, which evoke a response, rather than simply facts (or “information”), should be audio described (2010: 191). However, a balance needs to be found between the transfer of different types of content in order to reproduce both the informational signifiers of ‘first level story’ as well as the signifying forms of secondary meaning. In the same vein, Finbow believes that rather than describing, audio describers should “narrate” (2010: 215). Like Haig, Finbow asserts that films are “polysemiotic”, or cultural systems, so to exclude their signifying aspects from AD would be to deny the audience an integral part of the experience. He uses *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982) as an example, describing it as “full of literacy, artistic, cinematic and cultural nods and winks” (2010: 218). Citing Yeung in reference to Chao (2007), Finbow feels that audio describers can either “take the subsidiary role of co-narrators translating certain signs for the unsighted” (i.e., ‘fill in the blanks’), or “take the pro-active role of independent narrators, taking control of the overall product by making their own narration, the dialogues and the soundtrack work together” (Yeung, 2007 referenced by Finbow, 2010: 226). Braun (2008) believes that there is an “absence of established translation strategies” at present, which gives audio describers a degree of independence in how they carry out their work. Whilst the role of an audio describer as taking command of a work created without access in mind is polemical, the point Finbow makes about the need for the AD, dialogue and soundtrack to work together is valid, in other words, the cohesion of a work is essential to a successful audio description (Braun, 2011). The idea of audio narration (AN) replicating the aesthetics of film through iconic usage (likening shots to artworks, for example) is interesting, although being a more elaborate process of translation, may be too specialist and, therefore, time-consuming for general access to mainstream films. However, aspects of AN, which is a method that, in a sense, mimics the integrated, narrative style of character voiceovers, is already found in some AD currently, which Kruger also acknowledges (2010: 233). In the AD of *Defiance* (Zwick, 2008), for example, hundreds of displaced Jewish refugees are described as being “like black shadows moving across the landscape” and trudging “like a funeral cortege, slowly and solemnly across the endless flat marsh”. And there is no doubt that such a metaphorical description of the images adds expressive value to the action, encouraging additional cognitive activity on the part of the receiver to form deeper conceptual associations.
Investigating the “narrativisation” of film versus audio description, Kruger asserts that audiences without access to the “visual codes” receive a “fundamentally different” product to sighted spectators (2010: 235). He believes that “a description of the filmic WHAT, does not allow sufficient insight into the filmic HOW and WHY to allow optimal access” (2010: 246). Here, Kruger’s what is taken to stand for audio description on the literal level of a story, as opposed to the how of narrative composition, camera techniques, montage, etc., and the why of what this could indicate in wider terms. It is certainly accepted that the iconicity of film produces certain effects resulting from the how, which may need to be incorporated in AD to produce a better understanding of the why. However, a fundamental issue in AN is duration, with Kruger’s more literary examples being more lexically dense than the original samples of AD used. Audiences of film, unlike readers of literature, do not possess control over the time in which to process narrative (Mitry, 2000: 348) if they are to watch continuously, as intended, so it is important for forms of audio access in film viewing to be succinct. As the general guidelines for media access note: “However tempting it is to use colourful imagery and elegant turns of phrase, clarity is the main aim of audio description” (Ofcom, 2000: 13), implying that less verbose, briefer forms of expression would be much easier for audiences to process.

Moreover, Finbow believes that objectivity in AD causes audio describers to reveal excessive detail and spoil the effect of suspense (a problem he feels that could be overcome by AN) (2010: 226). Although it is accepted that undue interpretation or explicitation might spoil plot clues and risk patronising or alienating an audience, this could just as easily occur in more subjective forms of audio access, since this is rather a matter of poor judgement. Explicitation in film AD may, however, be appropriate in making some imagery clearer, which is of particular concern in AD for younger audiences, for example. In other words: “Stylistic shifts”, “by which a speaker adapts his language to the immediate context”, can be necessary in translation (Labov, 1978: 271). Applying pragmatic notions on explicit and implicit discourse (explicatures and implicatures) to the audio description of The Hours (Daldry, 2002), Braun (2007) also found that the AD of explicatures (“Earlier, she sits writing”, for example), rather than of each individual “cue” that activated them (a woman writing, a woman leaving a house, the sound effect of a nib on paper, for example), reduces the quantity of AD that an audience needs to process (2007: 364). But this is not to say that visually-impaired audiences would be unreceptive to more codified forms in AD (the description of symbolic referents or the results of technical composition such as contrastive lighting, for example) where appropriate language forms are found.
It is accepted that explicitation leaves little for the audience to decode personally, and so may need to be avoided in terms of semiotic content. No doubt, any ill-judged interpretative or explicit AD could spoil plot clues, as Finbow suggests, or confuse the target audience. In the AD of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Burton, 2005), for example, an extract of audio description reads: “This Kubrick-style scene is disturbed by the object turning into a Wonka bar!”, and it is doubtful whether visually-impaired children or many adults viewing a PG-rated (Parental Guidance) film would understand this explicit intertextual reference to the monolith and apes in Kubrick’s film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). It is also unlikely that sighted children would be familiar with the work of Kubrick, although these children would at least have the opportunity to ‘read’ the signifying form of the monolith literally on a denotative level; as a chocolate bar, for example. Even for a sighted adult, this choice of language does not allow the opportunity for personal response to the monolith, which might be ‘read’ connotatively as self-reflexive, a (rectangular) cinema screen within another screen (a TV monitor in the film’s diegesis, which contains the miniaturised character of Mike TV) within the spectator’s own screen (the film frame itself). Films contain both explicit and implicit signifiers, dealing explicitly with general themes and issues, and implicitly with more abstract ideas (Wilson, 1997: 225). By leaving commonplace elements implicit, this might also draw undue attention to them and occupy the audience’s time with assigning importance to inconsequential information. In the audio description of *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005), for example, the audio describer inadvertently draws attention to an actor’s moles by describing the character as having “three dark marks on his jawline”. This obscures the marks, misleadingly proposing something other than three moles on his face (bruises or lesions, for example).

Holland believes that what audio describers choose to highlight influences the audience’s experience and so the more that is known about the material, the more appropriate the choice will be (2009: 179). Like Finbow, Holland, therefore, feels it inadequate to focus on impartiality and objectivity in AD, since describing what the director and actors would “want you to see”, i.e., the “artistic intention”, is worth considering (2009: 173–174). The danger here, though, is that in describing what a filmmaker intends, the ‘vagueness’ of a symbolic signifier is abandoned. To use a basic example from *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009), an extract of AD reads: “Jim picks up a small model of what looks like the USS Kelvin with the bottom cylinder missing. He holds it up and some dust slides off”. There is no doubt in this scene that Jim was meant to contemplate this object, thinking back to the death of his father on the USS Kelvin and to his future with Starfleet Command (having just been reminded of this and offered a job). However, the object in question is not a model of the
USS Kelvin, but a salt seller shaped like a starship and with salt falling out. So, in directly describing what the director had wanted the audience to visualise, the audio describer has inappropriately divulged the *signified* of the sign.

Moreover, the process of how audio describers might more fully inform themselves of a filmmaker’s intention is not developed by Holland, Finbow or Kruger. Here, Udo and Fels suggest that directors could take part in the creation of AD to ensure equal access for everyone (2010: 191). Again, the practicalities of how this could work, since AD is written in the post-production stages, are not elucidated by these theorists. Moreover, Haig (2006: online) believes that audio-describers should collaborate directly with visually-impaired people. But since AV media is not usually created with visually-impaired audiences in mind, there is confusion as to how the limitations she has outlined between visual to verbal transfer might be progressed by this. In fact, unless the situation should evolve, audio describers are still “unlikely” to obtain a filmmaker’s input or approval (Ofcom, 2000: 7) even though AD produces a physically different product to the original (Piety, 2004). And visually-impaired people are just as unlikely to become involved in the AD process in the UK as it stands. As Chmiel and Mazur further assert: "It might be obvious that we need to ask the blind about their preferences in order to deliver good AD but it is much less clear how to elicit such feedback" (2012: 59). Greening is realistic in this regard: “There is no time [...]. You would be at least doubling the time taken to write”, and other than working to tight deadlines, audio describers often work in open plan offices, so their need for a quiet environment in which to concentrate precludes the idea of open discussion (2013: personal communication). Greening explains that in the early days working at the RNIB, audio describers were given two months to write and could work at home. She confirms that: “That’s how it should be done, but that’s not the real world. It’s now an industry” (2013: personal communication). Having said this, there is no reason why audio describers, presumably working under confidentiality agreements between film companies and post-production houses, could not be supplied with guidance notes, nor, with a minimal amount of adjustments and disruption, for persons with visual impairment to be employed as audio consultants during the “rec check” stage of the final recordings.

In summary, there is an evident gap in the literature concerning the qualitative analysis of film AD, particularly from a target audience perspective. Even where there is call for more integrated, narrative and subjective styles of writing, there is a lack of clarification as to how this might be achieved within the time limits of the original soundtracks. Furthermore, the way in which AD is currently produced in the UK, creates a discernible distance between the producers of film and the producers of audio description, which poses
difficulties in the interpretation and transmutation of ‘intention’ (the elements of authorial style). This ultimately broadens the distance between filmmakers and target users, with implications for the value of content. How succinct yet equivalent forms may be found for the wider elements of film narrative, particularly in the absence of the ‘author’ in the transfer process, may, however, be found in more traditional theories on language and translation.

2.2.3. **Translation models and linguistic theory**

In the UK, film AD is written by sighted individuals working primarily alone, without collaboration with visually-impaired people or with those with a first-hand experience of the particular films being worked on. This type of translation is distanced from both filmmakers and target audiences: the senders and receivers of film messages. However, translation theory may help in bridging the gap between the visual ‘language’ of film, or source language (SL), and the target language (TL) of AD scripts. The reason for this is that, although films are not the same as language, they have similar communicative qualities (Monaco, 2009: location 1016 of 14542), notwithstanding the unilateral nature of media messages (Baudrillard, 1988: 208; Metz, 1974: 75). Semiotic theory also shows that film narrative operates like language producing meaning through social constructs common to both sender and receiver (Stafford, 2007: 81). Moreover, the interpretation of film language involves a process by which “meaning is confirmed by being duplicated in a linguistic message” (Barthes, 1953: 78). This means that visual meaning is definable in language, making the analysis of film in some ways compatible with linguistic analysis, such as that carried out in traditional translation practice. It is, therefore, with reference to fundamental theories in translation in the broader context of semiotics and film theory, that this section will examine how the signifying forms of film important to secondary levels of meaning may be successfully incorporated in the language of AD. These translation rules will also be put to use in the qualitative, monolingualist analysis of audio described mainstream films (see chapter 4), as well as in the adjustment of samples of AD for comprehension-testing on research participants (see method section 3.4.2).

Preliminary to any translation is a specialist knowledge of the source language, including some understanding of the culture in which a text is situated. Background knowledge, coupled with an analysis of “text-type”, content and form by way of given clues (such as motifs, tempo and “parallelisms”) (Reiss, 1981: 162–4) can provide some insight into the author’s world and, consequently, into the intention, or “purpose”, of the communication (Nida, 1964: 43). Equally in AD transfer, it is important for audio describers to have an
extensive understanding of mainstream film culture and the common devices utilised in image construction. As stated previously, intertextuality places film texts within a wide syntagmatic network of interrelated constructions and messages, within which semiotic materials are “codeployed in ways that belong to a common intertextual pattern” (Baldry and Thibault, 2005: 5). ‘Text type’, or genre, is itself determined by way of recognisable usage, including “title graphics”; “accompanying music”; “lighting patterns”; “colour system”; and “types of discourse in the dialogue” (Bignell, 2002: 199). It, therefore, follows that the content of AD would reference a film’s genre through the inclusion of prototypical forms and naturally include patterns of motifs and structural elements to produce textual “linkage” (a term used by Grosse, referenced by Reiss, 1981: 63). Whilst the writers of film AD may not necessarily be qualified media translators, they may well have an interest in AV media, together with a lifetime’s experience of watching films, and so may be able to recognise the obvious patterns and systems in operation (print quality allowing). It is uncertain, however, to what extent an emersion in film media, as well as in the language of existing AD texts (which may only perpetuate the language norms of first level meaning), is enough for audio describers to be able to consciously distinguish the more covert signifiers of visual expression. Translators must be able to recognise “subtleties of meaning” in addition to what may be more “obvious” (Nida, 1964: 150) and align with an author’s intention (Nida, 1964: 154). In film, intention is reflected in the “directed reality” of aesthetic form (Mitry, 2000: 44), or style, which serves to channel secondary levels of meaning (Barthes, 1977: 17). Yet, whilst it is important to transmit “the spirit and manner” of an ‘author’s’ work (Campbell, 1789, referenced by Nida, 1964: 162), industry timescales in AD post-production may be too brief to be favourable to the in-depth analysis of works (see section 2.2.1); a situation which may, no doubt, be reflected in the range of signifying content produced.

Another consideration in translation is finding the most appropriate terms for content, in given contexts, to correspond semantically with those of an original work. Although it is accepted that “there can be no absolute correspondence between languages” (Nida, 1964: 156), texts of “equivalent effect” (Nida, 1964: 164) are often achievable. In the interlingual transfer of language, equivalence commonly hinges upon the replication of a text’s “dynamic character” (Nida, 1964: 120), producing for the target audience “the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message” (Nida, 1964: 167). Contrastively, “formal-equivalence (or F-E) translation is basically source-orientated” and includes the reproduction of “grammatical units” (including an exchange of “nouns by nouns, verbs by verbs, etc.”, and the same “marks of punctuation”); “consistency in word usage”; and a conservation of “meanings in terms of the source context” (Nida, 1964: 156).
165). In other words, signifying forms might be adjusted in D-E transfer, whereas they would be preserved in the F-E model. In film AD, finding verbal equivalents to correspond with the most important visual features, as prioritised by the audio describer, is of utmost concern, and this form of intersemiotic transfer could be described as the formal exchange of equivalent signifiers (the visible object by noun; action by verb; colour by adjective, and so on), within the same ‘grammatical’ structure of the narrative and in preservation of the original messages. A gesture, for example, which, for Danesi, is itself a type of language (1999: 86), might normally be exchanged in AD for the conventional linguistic equivalent: ‘waves’, ‘nods’, ‘frowns’, ‘points’, ‘shrugs’, and so on.

Although, as previously stated, literal translation may not be the most creative method of conveying artistic content (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995: 86–87), it may in many instances be enough to convey the visual signifiers of film in AD. This is because the content of mainstream films, in its straightforward representation of ‘reality’, exists, first and foremost, on a denotative level, with connotative form only able to find meaning through ‘anchoring’ events (Mitry, 2000: 344). However, this is not to say that audio describers can overlook the relationships and associations proposed semiotically in film narrative; rather, they need to be able to recognise and prioritise the paradigmatic and syntagmatic forms with the most potential for second level meaning. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 47) point out:

Visual structures do not simply reproduce the structures of ‘reality’. On the contrary, they produce images of reality which are bound up with the interest of the social institutions within which the images are produced, circulated and read. They are ideological. Visual structures are never merely formal: they have a deeply important semantic dimension.

The “semantic dimension” of film images is, therefore, bound in culture, and, as such, in the shared codes of language and figurative usage. Within language, tropes, including metaphors and metonymies, play a significant role in the transmission of meaning (Berger, 1991: 21), with metaphors pervasive in all aspects of human life (Geary, 2011: location 75 of 6083). It makes sense, therefore, that in making accessible their creative works, filmmakers will convey messages through visual analogy and association (as discussed in section 2.1.2). It also follows that the metaphor is paradigmatic and the metonymy syntagmatic (Jakobson referenced by Barthes, 1953: 122–123, and Mitry, 2000: 374), corresponding respectively to the synchronic and diachronic structuration of film. As such, finding equivalence for the iconic signifiers of metaphor and the indexical signifiers of metonymy in film AD is important in the creation of structure for the target
audience through the suggestion of relations and construction of patterns. For this reason, it might be expected to observe many examples in successful film AD of iconic signifiers, forming analogies and similes by way of resemblance; and of indexical signifiers, including the repetition and development of motifs. But, as Orero suggests, despite the importance of "metaphor, metonomy [sic] and synecdoche [sic], as the three basic forms of indexic transfer of meaning" (2012: 18), these are often absent from AD due to a lack of in-depth analysis (2012: 25).

Of course, any term chosen in translation needs to be plainly stated for receivers to be able to decipher messages at a suitable speed without tiring or becoming confused (Nida, 1964: 175). Such “easy and natural style in translating” is also important to equivalent response (Nida, 1964: 163). As Nida explains: “The more abstract or generic the meaning of a term, the more difficult it is to produce a mental image that adequately reflects the function of this symbol” (1964: 33). This enforces the need to avoid complex or specialist terms and constructions in film AD. In cases where terms cannot be directly translated from SL to TL, this might be overcome by “borrowing” (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995: 84–85), however, or by way of “neologisms” or “circumlocution” (Jakobson, 1959: 115). The concept of borrowing between two different sign systems in intersemiotic transfer is not straightforward, of course, but this could potentially involve the use of less complex technical forms and phrases, such as ‘fades to black’, ‘the scene fades’, ‘cut to’, ‘title sequence’, ‘shot’ and ‘framed’, which, although a detraction from the diegetic world of the narrative to varying degrees, may already be standardised in film AD and clear to target users (although this would need to be checked). However, other than in extra-diegetic situations, such as in the AD of titles and the signalling of a film’s end, some technical usage might be circumvented through descriptions of how something looks as a result of framing, lighting, point of view, and so on, rather than by how a shot is technically contrived, or by describing a new location rather than the physical ‘cut’ required to get there. It is accepted, however, that, in the absence of easily-appropriated or easily-found equivalents, neologisms might be formed in AD, just as in the double and triple hyphenated forms that have been commonly adopted to accelerate and condense spoken language.

In summary, although Piety notes that “no special language consideration” need be made in AD since visually-impaired people belong to the same “speech community” as sighted people (2004), an appropriate lexicon that makes sense to users and offers access to different layers of significance, is of key concern and may only be achieved through a more specialist understanding of film texts and language transfer. Film AD might also be
expected to respond to a filmmaker’s intention by finding semantic equivalents for stylistic visual form. Of course, equivalence does not mean “identical” (Belloc referenced by Nida, 1964: 159), so it is accepted that AD may never be able to replicate the intense visual experience of film. However, by attending to the iconic and indexical signifiers presented, in a process akin to formal translation, film AD may successfully help to elicit equivalent mental imagery in the minds of its receivers.

2.3. Conclusion and Research Hypothesis

This theoretical review outlines a number of defining principles in semiotics, film construction and visual impairment, and summarises the present situation in film AD practice, together with an analysis of academic perspectives and translation criteria in the intersemiotic transfer of AD. Such interdisciplinary analysis provides a context for qualitative research in film AD in that, although it has been established that signs permeate our lives, are important to our psychological and cultural identity, and, therefore, to the transmission of messages, including those of film media, they may not necessarily be included in the language of film AD.

The propositional nature of the signifying forms of signs, infers an intention to communicate, which can be interpreted by way of shared codes (Eco, 1984: 15–6). Where signifiers are more ambiguous, the interpretation of signs may require a deeper level of exploration on the level of referential meaning, or connotation. In the semiotic systems of mainstream films, audiences are presented with a multitude of visual and audible signifiers, both on the paradigmatic and syntagmatic planes, that can be interpreted on literal or secondary levels since films contain basic plot features as well as thematic and cultural references. These elements are also processed, in context, with the assistance of conventional codes (Bignell, 2002: 194), although may require a degree of “emphasis” (Barthes, 1977: 56) or additional knowledge to be processed as intended. For reasons of conventionality, Metz believed that “image discourse” did not require translation, being a “universal” mode of articulation (1974: 65). But in more modern times, where legislation justly includes provision for the needs of persons with sensory impairment, new modes of translation, including intersemiotic AD transfer, have been developed for different types of target audiences. Of course, a prerequisite in translation is that translators have an acceptable grasp of the “source language” (Nida, 1964: 150). In film AD, this necessitates a very good understanding across different genres of the techniques used in composition, editing and camera work to generate meaning, as well as being able to equate these on a paradigmatic and syntagmatic level to distinguish the most important features and motifs.
The forms proposed in mainstream film will often be thematic or cultural and so analogies and associations are pervasive (just as metaphor and metonymy are extensively used in language). When presenting the forms of visual discourse in film AD, although the ‘mode of articulation’ is verbal, the incorporation of sign forms may be no less meaningful to visually-impaired viewers who have the capacity to construct mental imagery from visual memory, haptic and auditory experience or language knowledge (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011: 203). Where language is social (Saussure, 1959: 6), it is also expected that members of the same society (including those with VI) will produce roughly similar meanings from language in particular contexts, that is “the same signs united with the same concepts” (Saussure, 1959: 12). The relationship between the linguistic signifier and signified is not, therefore, arbitrary, but “contractual”, based on common and historical usage (Barthes, 1953: 115). In summary, a word cannot signify freely, but has assigned and limited values, and even in the most ‘open’ of texts: “You cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it” (Eco, 1979: 9). The implications of this for film AD and in respect of this research is that it is expected that visually-impaired people will interpret sign forms in similar ways to sighted people, being bound by the same rules of language, and that their interpretation of film imagery will be largely based on convention.

In short, understanding a film, its target audience, and the mechanics of intersemiotic translation are fundamental in film AD if a balance is to be found between straightforward accessibility at a basic story level and the more expressive value of narrative. As such, AD might be considered an evolving skill open to new perspectives and committed, through language, to the construction of cultural equivalents that fully connect visually-impaired audiences to the world of AV media. In reality, however, the constraints imposed upon audio describers undoubtedly limit the time available to turn their assignments around and the scope to work more analytically, collaboratively and innovatively. But despite the limits of their working environments, it is ultimately the audio describer who bears the responsibility for aligning as creatively as possible with the source material and rendering suitable equivalents for visual elements with the most potential for significance.

Research hypothesis

Based on the understandings discussed in this chapter, this research hypothesises that signifying forms important to secondary (connotational) significance are an integral part of mainstream films and can be found in the aesthetics of genre, mise-en-scène, camera techniques and montage (with complementary signifiers in the music and sounds).
Subsequently, that the inclusion of these visual forms in film AD would constitute an equivalence in translation that would provide target users with corresponding opportunities to process films on deeper levels. In proposing new meanings and posing more cognitive challenges, it is considered that these forms will hold wider psychological and cultural value for the target user of AD. This hypothesis presupposes the “psychological” nature of linguistic concepts (Saussure, 1959: 11), as well as the social character of language (Saussure, 1959: 6) in that people with VI of intact cognitive ability and sighted people have an equal capacity for mental conceptualisation due to a shared use of language (including the ability to decode messages, make inferences and form associations). It has been noted, however, that signifying forms of first level significance pertaining to ‘first level story’ are prioritised in film AD (including character appearance, location and action (Piety, 2004; Salway, 2007) ). So, although some film AD will, by default, include signifiers that might be ‘read’ on a secondary, or symbolic, level (certain clothing, colours, objects and locations, for example), it is believed that the more stylistic forms of film will be largely marginalised in AD production. To develop this hypothesis further, a framework for the analysis, classification and testing of film AD will be outlined in chapter 3. The overall aims of this being to understand what aspects of the codified content of mainstream films are important to wider significance (in response to research question 1), whether these are equitably proposed in film AD (in response to research question 2) and what value this holds for target users in respect of equivalent processing opportunities, meaning and enjoyment (in response to research question 3).
3. Methodological Approach

3.1. Introduction

The underlying hypothesis of this research is that the audio description of referential forms with the potential for secondary level significance in mainstream films would mean greater equivalence in translation and provide target users with similar opportunities for meaning-making as those available to sighted audiences. This is both an ethical and quality issue. It has been established thus far, however, that processes in AD for media access were developed some time ago and that existing UK guidelines have only general relevance to film, being primarily written for television. Traditional models may, therefore, need to be reviewed, particularly now that AD has become better established and film audiences may be open to a wider range of content.

Early studies in the reception of AD largely focussed on the validation of this as a useful service as television and video access were developed, including the testing of equipment and the drafting of guidelines for AD practitioners. The Audetel research, for example, carried out in the UK between April 1992 and December 1995, included a widely-distributed questionnaire, experimental viewings with 200 participants, the testing of equipment with 100 people watching up to 10 hours of AD per week, a critical focus group and a trial service nationally (Ofcom, 2000). A survey was later carried out for the American Foundation for the Blind in 1997 profiling 471 people from the blind and visually-impaired community in the United States in respect of their television and video viewing habits, which helped to demonstrate the value of AD as an enhanced viewing experience (Packer and Kirchner, 1997: online). More recently, the RNIB’s qualitative and quantitative research project in the UK: Bollywood for All: the Demand for Audio Described Bollywood Films (2009), sought to understand the demand for audio described Bollywood films in the UK and India, the preferred medium, language and outreach methods (Rai, 2009: 3). Such extensive and foundational surveys have been important in reinforcing the need for AD as a (social) viewing aid, although investigation into the structure and reception of film AD would have been outside the scope of this work.

Academic research methods for the collection and analysis of AD data from English language films have been largely corpus-based with analyses focussing on the idiosyncratic features of AD language for the purpose of classifying television programmes and films, investigating the linguistic function of AD or researching the automation of access technologies (see Turner, 1998; Piety, 2004; and Salway, 2007, respectively).
Comparative studies have also been made from an interlingual perspective investigating the feasibility of translating AD scripts into other languages (see Bourne and Hurtado, 2007, for example). Iglesias Fernandez et al. (2011) additionally tested the influence of AD voice quality on comprehension, atmosphere and character psychology (Chmiel and Mazur, 2012: 63); and Chmiel and Mazur (2012) have been involved in research concerning preferences and comprehension in AD in Poland where this is a relatively unknown service. Additionally, in Louise Fryer’s seminar, Calling the Shots, held at City University, London in May 2010, a screening of David Lean’s Brief Encounter (1945) formed part of a film AD project trialling a different type of AD in which camera angles and shot composition were included. However, these studies have not specifically addressed the quality of film AD nor the adequacy of content at a lexical level to convey on-screen imagery of connotative value simply and receptively to users. An alternative body of work that looks at subject positioning in AD has begun to emerge (as discussed in chapter 2), with focus on the creativity of the describer as ‘audio-describing subject’ and the nature of the audience as ‘receiving subject’ in an equitable and culturally-communicative process (see Haig, 2006; and Holland, 2009). And there has been a new wave of discourse, building on the early observations of Chao (2002), concerning description versus narration in audio access (see Finbow, 2010; and Kruger, 2010). However, sufficient empirical evidence for a fuller, more aesthetic film experience has not been put forward to date.

Moreover, multiple methods, including general translation models and didactic and historical perspectives, have been used in the analysis of AV texts (Chaume, 2004: online). Chaume (2004: online) additionally sought to define a new methodological framework in AV translation for the analysis of the “signifying codes of cinematographic language”. As stated:

An audiovisual text is a semiotic construct comprising several signifying codes that operate simultaneously in the production of meaning. A film is composed of a series of codified signs, articulated in accordance with syntactic rules.

Thus, the problem of translating iconography is recognised, that is, the icons, indices and symbols of coded film language. However, despite this focus in AV translation, there remains a distinct lack of source models and perspectives concerning AD.

In short, following the establishment of AD as a worthwhile service and its technical implementation in the UK, analytical frameworks have mostly concerned the quantitative analyses of AD language. This is also despite Chao’s early work in the reception of AD
calling for an audio-narrative style. No known data, therefore, exists in the context of AD concerning: (i) the important signifying values of film and how these might be understood, (ii) whether these elements are attended to by audio describers, and (iii) the value of these forms for target users (as pertain to the research questions). In the absence of such data, this study concerns the qualitative analysis of film and AD content, together with audience response to the propositional forms of signs. In this respect, the aim of this chapter is to outline the methodological framework applied to the analysis of audio described mainstream films in order to more fully understand the signifying content available; to verify whether this is included in film AD currently; and, ultimately, to understand the value of sign forms for target users.

3.2. Research design: an overview of the methodological stages

To respond to the questions of how to identify and understand the important signifying forms of mainstream films, whether these forms are appropriately handled in film AD, and in what ways their inclusion in AD might hold value for users, a framework was required for analysing audio described films and testing different versions of AD content on participants. In the development of this framework, a preliminary study was carried out based around three main sources of data: (i) the original and audio described content of 28 mainstream films selected as randomly as possible from the collections of friends, media stores and LoveFilm; (2) user feedback on extracts from 2 of these films, including clips of original and adjusted AD audio; and (3) responses gathered from semi-structured interviews and group discussions around user preferences and understanding. These sources of data constituted a qualitative approach as opposed to quantitative data gathering, since qualitative investigation enables us to learn “how a system works or fails to work”, and to understand issues from “multiple perspectives” (Weiss, 1994: location 277 of 4574). In film research, for example, qualitative interviewing can generate data on “perceptions and reactions” (Weiss, 1994: location 295 of 4574), which a standardised survey would not be able to elicit. Specifically, the pilot study sought to test the theory of ‘obviousness’ in the observation and interpretation of semiotic content in mainstream films (see section 2.1.1), to verify whether relevant signifying forms were successfully transferred to AD, and to gauge the extent to which these forms might hold value for users. These areas of exploration constituted the “substantive frame” (Weiss, 1994: location 381 of 4574) of the research methodology, that is, the main basis from which to respond to the research questions.
In the first part of the pilot study, many constructions of definable, connotational significance were found during a first viewing of the films with little or no background research, some of which were transferred in a straightforward and equivalent manner in the AD. However, numerous issues were also observed in the AD, including partial to complete loss of referential signifiers, and the substitution of signifiers for signifieds (in the case of undue explicitation). From this, it was concluded that this type of textual analysis is an effective way of gathering qualitative data concerning the transference of visual imagery in film AD, including any inconsistencies in AD practice.

In step two of the pilot study, audio extracts and AD from 2 of the films previously analysed were tested on 1 sighted male and 1 sighted female participant (being a convenience sample of people available, as well as allowing an opportunity to also test the full AV clips in order to appreciate the general norms of visual comprehension). One subject was played the film clips with original AD, whereas the other was played the same clips with AD adjusted to include more connotational signifiers. This type of testing provided interesting data in respect of how people create mental imagery: their invention of mental scenarios in the absence of AD, for example; the influence and distortions of music and sounds; and the difficulty in hearing some parts of the audio clips without visual imagery. However, this method did not always prompt a conscious response to the signifying forms included in the AD. Only the most obvious connotations were referred to, for example that the new house in The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas (Herman, 2008) resembled a prison to both participants, which, to 1 subject, was reinforced by the bars of the hall staircase in front of one of the characters when the audio-visual version was shown at the end. This may be because the participants were asked to retell what they had understood from the clips and, as a result, had concentrated on providing information at a basic story level. Moreover, the participants did not immediately recall everything that they had picked up, which seemed to indicate that the clips, although broken down by scene, were too long or that the AD was not emphatic enough for details to be committed to memory. The lessons learned from this pilot exercise, particularly from the feedback relating to the full AV clips, which elicited more responses relating to iconic and indexical usage, were that shorter clips, a greater emphasis on important signifiers and a greater focus on what the participants had visualised from the imagery would be necessary to generate the required data in the full study.

To complement the qualitative information gathered from the AD testing exercise, discussion groups and semi-structured interviews were held in early 2012. Groups of blind and visually-impaired Secondary and Sixth Form students at New College Worcester
(NCW) were engaged in discussions relating to film viewing and AD, which was extremely useful in providing a broad understanding of AD and social viewing norms from the perspective of young visually-impaired people. However, these sessions did not generate perspectives on film imagery, nor information on how this might be processed via AD. This method was not, therefore, continued in the full study. By contrast, the semi-structured interviews, which were carried out with the normally-sighted subjects from the AD testing exercise, plus an individual who has been visually-impaired since birth, were found to be a very useful way of gathering specific data concerning viewing preferences and the interpretation of visual imagery, the latter of which was achieved by asking the participants to form word associations for a number of short verbalised scenarios.

The general aim of the three main methodological steps was to determine whether AD can or does articulate the important semiotic content of mainstream film in addition to content of ‘first level story’, and whether the expression of such content holds value for visually-impaired users. The conclusions reached from the pilot study were that the direct analysis of film and AD content is the most effective way of identifying and understanding imagery important to secondary level meaning and the appropriateness of image transfer in film AD. Moreover, that the focussed testing of different AD versions and the semi-structured interviewing of visually-impaired and normally-sighted participants could generate relevant complementary data in respect of norms and user value. These steps were, therefore, considered an effective substantive framework for a fuller study responding to the individual research questions:

(i) What visual forms are important to connotational significance in mainstream film and how can they be understood? 
(ii) Do AD texts attend to these visual forms appropriately? 
(iii) What value does the audio description of visual signifiers have for target users?

A summary of the three methodological stages used in the full study is laid out below:

*Step 1: Analysis of film and AD content*

In step 1 of the research methodology, 10 mainstream British and American films available on DVD with English audio descriptive tracks were analysed to determine the important semiotic features and how these are handled in the audio description. This method of analysis was designed to respond to research questions 1 and 2, which sought to identify and understand the forms most important to visual connotation in film and
whether these are appropriated in AD language. This method also responded in part to research question 3 by exploring the wider values of meaning that might be derived from visual imagery. The films analysed were selected from the more random corpus of 28 films previewed in the pilot study and were chosen as representative of a small cross-section of popular mainstream material from different directors, audio describers and post-production agencies. It should be noted, however, that of the 28 UK DVDs initially reviewed, 19 (approximately 68%) were audio described by London agency, ITFC, with 5 by IMS and 2 by Deluxe, and the remaining 2 were not credited (see figure 1). Moreover, that 25% of the 28 films were audio described by James O'Hara and over 21% by Matthew Vickers, both of ITFC (see figure 2). The diversity of material available from different audio describers was, therefore, limited by the share of film industry contracts amongst agencies.

Figure 1: Agencies that audio described the films featured in the pilot study

Figure 2: Audio describers who wrote / co-wrote the AD used in the pilot study
The choice of films was also limited by the availability of audio description tracks, with the largest choice of audio described films being produced in more recent years.

Using the theoretical knowledge from chapter 2, a descriptive qualitative analysis was carried out on each film individually as a semiotic system with its own stylistic framework and thematic contexts. As Barthes states, “semiology can only be conceived in a so to speak total framework” (1977: 49), so to understand the important paradigmatic and syntagmatic features of these works, the works themselves, taken separately, provided the contextual basis for meaning and linkage within the narrative and AD language. As previously stated, intertextuality also provides contexts from filmmaking culture, so reference was made to external works where specifically observed in the individual films. The individual analyses were then followed by a comparison of the data across all of the films to highlight any patterns in the film and AD content within the general categories of genre, mise-en-scène, camera techniques and montage, with supplementary data under music and sounds.

In addition to the theoretical material, reference aids were required during the film analysis. These were primarily lexical resources, including Cirlot’s Dictionary of Symbols (2001), which is an extensive guide to the symbolic meaning of common forms (birds, colours, crosses, houses and mountains, for example); general encyclopaedic reference material to understand terms relating to film themes, including cultural and historical information; and literary works, where relevant, as original and, therefore insightful, sources of narrative themes and imagery. Where available in the DVD extras, interviews and directors’ commentaries were sometimes referred to for emphasis of stylistic motivation, although to make a fair analysis of the AD, material that would not normally have been available at the time the films were audio described (including blogs and articles), was largely avoided.

The procedures for how the semiotic content was identified, analysed and classified are outlined more fully in section 3.4.1.

**Step 2: Testing of different AD samples**

Analysing content alone will not demonstrate the “effects on audiences of the material being studied” (Berger, 2011: 206). This means that to more fully understand the value of visual imagery for users of film AD, in response to research question 3, data concerning the reception and processing of this type of content was also required. The assumption
was made that the audio description of semiotic features with the potential for second-level meaning could enhance the viewing experience for target users (see section 2.3). To validate this theory and define ‘value’ more precisely, different types of AD were tested on users. These tests were carried out individually with 5 congenitally or adventitiously blind individuals and a control group of 5 sighted participants. First, responses to extracts of audio with no AD from 4 of the films previously analysed were used as a starting point from which to understand the specific differences AD can make to film viewing. Next, responses to the same audio extracts including the original AD with a minimal potential for connotational meaning were tested against responses to the same extracts with adjusted versions of this AD to include more semiotic features (see appendix 1 for the adjustments made). Here, the participants were played either the original AD with two clips followed by the adjusted AD with two further clips, or vice versa, meaning that 5 participants received the original AD and 5 the adjusted AD for each of the 4 film clips. This rotation of clips allowed the testing of both types of AD with each participant and helped to randomise the results. The sighted participants were additionally played the full AV version of each clip at the end to generate a baseline of data pertaining to visual norms. The objective of this method was ultimately to understand, by comparison, whether the responses to the film audio with adjusted AD demonstrated a greater capacity for the building of mental imagery on a more figurative level. In this way, this method also partially responded to research question 2 by highlighting any inadequacies in the original AD when compared to the adjusted AD texts.

In the creation of the adjusted extracts, the paradigmatic and syntagmatic elements with the most potential for secondary meaning (as identified and interpreted during the film analysis stage) were transferred to the verbal language of AD using an F-E method of translation. These visual signifiers, deemed as missing or partially or inappropriately transferred in the original AD, were exchanged for equivalent ‘grammatical units’ (objects for nouns, colours for adjectives, and so on), and in an equivalent manner (emphatically, analogically or associatively, for example), with attention to source meanings, linkage and repetition. The objective of this was to suggest relations and patterns to the participants with no undue explicitation of meaning.

Finally, due to the limited functionality found during the pilot study when using the standard AD software, ADePT (from Softel Ltd), with a laptop, the AD for the full study was recorded using Camtasia software (from TechSmith.com). The original extracts of AD were also re-recorded so that all of the extracts (original and adjusted) were voiced by the same person, to limit the possibility of bias towards a particular AD voice or of the
participants guessing which extracts were professionally recorded for DVD. The program used also allowed the combination of a number of video clips into one file, which made the playback of multiple clips more efficient during the test. Additionally, due to the brevity of the clips, it was not envisaged that any form of note-taking would be necessary, although the visually-impaired participants were informed in advance so that they could make provision for this if necessary, although this option was not taken up at the time. The feedback was also digitally recorded with the participants’ prior verbal consent, supported in writing by email in all but one case where email exchange was not available, although the purpose of these recordings was as a memory aid only following the tests and interview sessions.

The full procedures for testing the different samples of AD are detailed in section 3.4.2.

**Step 3: Semi-structured interviews**

The third methodological stage of the research comprised a short semi-structured interview, which was carried out directly after the AD sample tests with the same respondents (see appendix 2 for an outline of the interview questions). The aim of this exercise was to understand the participants’ backgrounds, sight conditions, interests, film preferences, experiences of AD and, ultimately, the understanding of visual concepts by different people. Through a combination of open and closed-ended questions, beginning generally and ending with the verbalisation of specific film scenarios, a broad understanding of preferences and comprehension was gained from this method, together with a focussed set of results concerning the processing of film imagery, which could be directly compared between subjects and which contributed to an understanding of the value of connotation in AD, in response to research question 3. In particular, by isolating connotational forms in brief verbal scenarios taken directly from film scenes and asking the participants what words they associated with them, the subjects’ processing choices were made conscious and immediate, revealing aspects of what might be gained from signifying form in language. This data was then used in complement of that gathered during the AD audio tests in which the signifying content was inseparable from the distractions of other sounds and story contexts. Finally, the sighted control group was asked to briefly relate what they could see in a number of colour film stills. This additional question section had the same objective as the verbal scenarios of making the significance of imagery conscious, and enabled a level of comparison between the processing of visual images and the mental processing of verbal concepts. The results from the semi-structured interview also helped in the comprehension of whether signifying
forms that may or may not have been included in the original film AD could be understood in equivalent ways by people of different backgrounds and interests.

The more detailed procedures for carrying out the semi-structured interviews are laid out in section 3.4.3.

In summary, step 1 of the research design (the analysis of film and AD content) provided the main body of methodological data, responding to each of the 3 research questions concerning the identification and meaning of connotational imagery, adequacy in the transference of this imagery in film AD, and the potential value of this content for target users. Steps 2 and 3 (AD testing and semi-structured interviews) provided small complementary samples of primary data designed in particular to respond to research question 3 concerning the value of visual signifiers for AD users through an improved understanding of what people derive from connotational messages. The AD audio test in step 2 also brought attention to certain issues in AD transfer and, in this respect, partially responded to research question 2 concerning the appropriate handling of semiotic content in the original AD.

3.3. Subjects

The criteria for the selection of participants for steps 2 (AD testing) and 3 (semi-structured interviews) of the research methodology, are detailed below:

(i) Contrasting profiles. Where available, male and female subjects of differing backgrounds and varying adult ages were tested and interviewed to facilitate a broader understanding of preferences and comprehension, as well as to randomise the results as much as possible.

(ii) English mother tongue. For consistency and to limit the misinterpretation of cultural meanings, only British native speakers of English were chosen.

(iii) Normally-sighted, congenitally blind and adventitiously blind individuals with ‘decision-making capacity’. Due to the ethical considerations of a study of this type, no persons who could be considered “vulnerable” (as defined under the Surrey Ethics Committee guidelines as “lacking the capacity to make a decision”), for whom audio description may not be accessible in any case (Ofcom, 2000), were asked to participate in this research. Normally-sighted subjects were included, not only to increase the sample size in the absence of more visually-impaired volunteers, but because full audio-visual perception is considered the norm in film viewing and so it
was expected that these subjects would provide control data concerning visual understanding that could be compared with the understandings of AD users. Additionally, it was important to interview both congenitally and adventitiously blind individuals for randomisation and to more widely appreciate any differences in language and processing abilities that might be influential in the production of AD.

The research volunteers were reached through various sources, including through professional contacts working in audio description and academia; via referral from the Additional Learning Support team at the University of Surrey; and by writing to a local community club for visually-impaired people. The volunteers are from a range of backgrounds and are engaged in various occupations, including acting, senior managerial, skilled manual trade, teaching, full-time university student and retired professional. Although participation in this research was completely anonymous, outline profiles for the respondents are given below to demonstrate their general diversity, which is an important factor in ‘maximising range’ in interview responses (Weiss, 1994: location 521 of 4574):

Table 1: Profiles of participants tested and interviewed in the full study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Interests</th>
<th>Sight Condition</th>
<th>Age of Onset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Travelling, reading, walking, learning a foreign language</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Music, DIY, family</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Music, films, sport</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Coffee, socialising, family</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Film and film language, sport, reading, hiking</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Target shooting, drama, acting, Dr Who, cricket</td>
<td>Congenital Glaucoma (no light perception; some visual memory)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Animals, cooking, sewing, making things, reading, watching TV</td>
<td>Temporal Arteritis and polymyalgia affecting the nerves (no light perception; has visual memory)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Films and TV, golf, skiing, IT</td>
<td>Loss of vision as the result of an accident (no light perception; has visual memory)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Listening to the radio, volunteering for an organisation for blind people</td>
<td>Stargardt’s disease (macular degeneration with a loss of central vision) (some light perception and vision; has visual memory)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Sight Condition</td>
<td>Age of Onset</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Cricket, sport, literature, learning Spanish, film and theatre</td>
<td>Leber's Amaurosis (hereditary) (small amount of light perception and some visual memory)</td>
<td>Deterioration from birth to late teens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that the number of participants in this qualitative study (5 visually-impaired and 5 normally-sighted) is much less than would be required in a quantitative approach. A qualitative framework generally produces more lengthy and detailed data and so the sample size is usually small in comparison to a quantitative survey (Weiss, 1994: location 145 of 4574). Research steps 2 and 3 were also small scale studies designed to complement the main body of data gathered from the film and AD content analysis in step 1, and more directly respond to research question 3 regarding the value of film imagery for AD users. Moreover, since the meaning of visual messages in mainstream films was expected to be fairly accessible and understandable, it was predicted that there would be many equivalences in the participants’ responses early on, generating sufficient qualitative data without the need for further respondents, which, in fact, turned out to be the case.

### 3.4. Procedures

The steps taken to collect and analyse sufficient qualitative data relevant to this study can be broken down per research question. To respond to research question 1: "What visual forms are important to connotational significance in mainstream film and how can they be understood?", a descriptive analysis of the propositional forms from a sufficient number of films was required until nothing new could be generally deduced in terms of paradigmatic and syntagmatic methods of meaning-making. As Barthes states: “The corpus must be wide enough to give reasonable hope that its elements will saturate a complete system of resemblances and differences” (1953: 156), and, as anticipated from the previews in the pilot study, the 10 films selected for full analysis were sufficient to produce enough visual data to respond to this question. In response to research question 2: “Do AD texts attend to these visual forms appropriately?”, the descriptive analysis of visual film data needed to be interwoven with a comparative analysis of the relevant segments of AD to verify where equivalences had been met, or where loss, partial or inadequate transfer had occurred. Finally, in response to research question 3: “What value does the audio description of visual signifiers have for target users?”, the descriptive analysis of film and AD content needed to incorporate assumptions based on a logical and shared understanding of language, including the valid thematic and cultural values that can be derived from connotational form. Such assumptions were then corroborated and supplemented by the testing of different samples of AD (with and without sufficient signifying content) to further
understand the value of signs for real consumers of film, and by a semi-structured interview designed to gauge user preferences and attitudes towards more figurative and stylistic content.

These three stages of data gathering: (i) the analysis of film and AD content, (ii) the testing of different AD samples, and (iii) the semi-structured interviewing of respondents, are outlined in more detail below.

### 3.4.1. Analysis of film and AD content

There are varying approaches by which films might be analysed to seek out meanings and relationships in the narrative system, including the psychological analysis of characters and the political analysis of plots (see Berger, 1991). More generally, however, since films contain both “static” and “evolutionary” features (Berger, 1991: 14), a semiological method that elicits data synchronically (at fixed points) and diachronically (historically), by searching for paradigmatic features along the syntagmatic ‘chain’ of messages, is considered a useful means of approach (Berger, 1991: 28). For the methodological purposes of this research, which concerned not only the identification and understanding of visual forms important to connotational meaning (research question 1), but also the appropriateness and value of their intersemiotic “transmutation” (Jakobson, 1959: 114) in AD (research questions 2 and 3), an analysis of linguistic meanings was imperative. Considering the “semantic dimension” of the visual (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 47), of film structure (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 265) and of language forms such as metaphor (Danesi, 1999: 91), as well as the semantic associations that can be made by visually-impaired people in the formation of mental imagery (Cattaneo and Vecchi, 2011), a semantic, as opposed to syntactic or pragmatic analysis was preferred. Finally, it followed that patterns of data would emerge from the intertextuality of mainstream films and the accompanying AD language (as outlined in section 2.1.2), so the data was summarised under broad categories of narrative construction: genre, mise-en-scène, camera techniques and montage, with a discussion of music and sounds. The procedures used in the identification, evaluation and categorisation of the connotative elements of the audio described films analysed are outlined below.

*Identification of visual signifiers*

From a semiological perspective, it was anticipated that many of the symbolic constructions in the films analysed would be fairly “obvious” as a result of emphatic usage
(Barthes, 1977: 56) (as discussed in section 2.1.2). By first identifying the ‘text type’, or genre in operation in the films studied and understanding how the relevant features were differentiated (using theoretical knowledge from section 2.1.2), such as by asking why certain emphasis occurs in particular contexts, it was expected that many of the visual signifiers would become conspicuous and their signification more easily determined. As Baldry and Thibault state, “dynamic features are typically foregrounded against a static background” (2005: 38). But additional methods are employed in mainstream filmmaking to differentiate and express, including contrasts of colour and light, framing, camera angle, repetition, juxtaposition, musical overtones, and so on. Thus, understanding how emphasis is achieved in film construction, together with the questioning of signifiers that are made prominent, even subtly, in various contexts, were central to the identification of important semiotic content. This method also touched upon Kruger’s suggestion that a greater attention to the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of film narrative might be required in iconographic transfer (2010: 246) (see section 2.2.2), by seeking to understand how and why certain emphasis occurs.

A simple example of paradigmatic differentiation can be seen in the “formalistic” structure (Eco, 1979: 146) of the James Bond film Casino Royale. Bond’s adversary, Le Chiffre, has a dysfunctional left eye, which is milky and weeps blood, making him stand out. This feature is consistent throughout the film and is denotative of damage or disease. But this element is also mirrored by other characters, forming a thematic relationship between them. Valenka, for instance, has a sweeping fringe covering her left eye during a scene in which she poisons Bond. Gettler also, who appears wearing an eye patch over his left eye towards the end of the film before the betrayal of Bond, bears a sinister plot connotation. In the syntagmatic frameworks of ‘Bond’ filmmaking and mainstream filmmaking generally, a physical irregularity creates a link: first, to ‘Bond’ villains who are often disfigured, unattractive or of sombre or unusual appearance (see Eco, 147–155), and, secondly, to antecedent clichéd henchmen. As Eco elucidates: “Bond represents Beauty and Virility as opposed to the Villain, who often appears monstrous and sexually impotent” (1979: 148). This contrastive and distorted form is, therefore, an indexical sign referring to a villainous nature.

Thus, the questioning of distinctive visual features in the films analysed, paying attention to contrasts, distortions and subversions in the images and understanding how these relate both contextually (comparing articulations in different scenes to identify motifs, for example) and intertextually (identifying wider patterns of association), were central to the identification of signifying forms important to connotative meaning.
Once the propositional forms were identified, they required interpretation to gauge their meaning and importance. As outlined in section 2.1.1, the comprehension of a sign in Peirce’s triadic model requires an “interpretant”, which is influenced by the codes of the system in which it operates (Chandler, 2007: 147). These codes can be understood as rules (or “formulas” in mainstream culture (Berger, 1991: 25) ), such as the rules of grammar, which allow the interpretation of language. As such, codes relate to the interpreter’s knowledge of how different systems work, for instance language, media and social systems, and how these systems relate to each other (Chandler, 2007: 149–150). For Metz, there are two principal kinds of “signifying organization: cultural codes and specialized codes”; the former being universally understood by members of the same social group, with the latter concerning “more specific and restricted social activities” (1974: 112). In the mainstream films analysed, it was expected that the specialised rules of genre, media composition, camera techniques, montage, and music and sounds, might each be at play at any one time, together with a number of recognisable cultural codes. Hence, a paradigmatic analysis was necessary to consider the “simultaneity” of signifiers in “static” situations (Berger, 1991: 14), relating these to the syntagmatic or ‘evolving’ (Berger, 1991: 14) structure of the narratives as a whole. As Danesi confirms, “forms are recognized as legitimate meaning-bearing signs when they fit structurally into their respective codes–language, number systems, card games, etc.” (1999: 44). Metonymic relationships, for example, are codifications that can be derived by way of “semiotic judgements” from the “structure of the semantic field” (Eco, 1979: 68), as based on “conditioned” response (Mitry, 2000: 19). Ultimately, the rules of a code must be understood in the same way by both sender and receiver (Eco, 1984: 16), so it was predicted that many of the codes in the films analysed would be what Bordwell termed “easily acquired” (1996a: 95). Where many connotational constructions would, in consequence, be highly conventionalised requiring little decoding effort, others were expected to be more “vaguely coded” (Eco, 1984: 39) requiring a more specialist background knowledge. The film analysis step, therefore, needed to establish which system of conventions the semiotic content functioned within and suggest what forms could rationally imply, i.e., the ‘preferred reading’ in given contexts, using additional reference material where necessary.

Again, taking the example of Le Chiffre from Casino Royale and using the now-hackneyed although preserved media code in operation in the ‘Bond’ franchise that negative or dysfunctional characteristics indicate an antagonist (in opposition to Bond’s more positive
attributes) (Eco, 1979: 148), it could be easily deduced that Le Chiffre is an antagonist. It also followed that those characters mirroring Le Chiffre in appearance would be similarly antagonistic. This logical interpretation was confirmed by the characters' behaviour in the syntagmatic structure of the film, highlighting the importance of previewing each film prior to the assessment of paradigmatic features at fixed points in the narrative, as an essential first stage in the evaluation process.

From a semantic point of view, signification might be derived from symbolic and figurative constructions (as discussed in chapter 2). Death, for example, can be symbolised in a "journey"; "sexual pleasure" in “dancing, riding, climbing, flying”; and male genitalia in the form of a plane (Fromm referenced by Berger, 1991: 70). But, as Nida states, “there are some types of messages which are purposely ambiguous”, with many works of fiction having “one overt and one or more covert levels” (1964: 101). Context, therefore, factors prominently in the determination of intended meaning (Nida, 1964: 40), including thematic, intertextual and socio-cultural contexts, which narrows the possible semantic outcomes (Nida, 1964: 116).

Following their interpretation and evaluation, the signifying forms of connotation needed to be assessed in the context of audio description since not all onscreen imagery can be realistically reproduced in the condensed form of AD, so the value of each element (its potentiality to convey meaning and aesthetic intention, for example) and the semantic equivalent that might be formally achieved in the timeframes needed to be judged. The following criteria were also borne in mind, however: (i) the necessity to prioritise information essential to a cohesive story, since in translation where negotiation is not possible “meaning must have priority over style” (Tancock, 1958 referenced by Nida, 1964: 164); and (ii) the potentiality of other significant imagery appearing at the same time. These considerations need not deter the transmutation of stylistic features in AD, however, since language can be multi-functional, combining a range of different forms, and it is also important to remember that a lack of attention to form in translation can result in unexceptional texts that do no justice to the original (Nida, 1964: 164), so the AD was judged on this basis also.

Classification of data

In addition to the wide range of signifying forms proposed in texts, is the diversity of their contextual situations (Nida, 1964: 31), so categorisation is not always straightforward. Signs can also be made up of a number of different visual signifiers, which might each be
classified differently. As Saussure states, “language does not offer itself a set of pre-delimited signs that need only be studied according to their meaning and arrangement; it is a confused mass” (1959: 103). Thus, for Barthes, the grouping of signifiers means the appropriate organisation of systems, including the grouping of “units into paradigmatic classes” and the classification of “the syntagmatic relations which link these units” (1953: 112). Equally, in translation, a classification of symbolic referents can be made “(1) by segmentation and (2) by distinguishing shared qualities”, such as in colour classification (Nida, 1964: 34). In multimodal systems, collections might also be made “under the concept of the typical sign: the verbal sign, the graphic sign, the iconic sign, the gestural sign”, for example (Barthes, 1953: 112). Thus, following the semiotic analysis of the mainstream film systems, presented in section 4.2, the identified paradigmatic forms of connotational significance and their respective syntagmatic relationships were classified under distinctive ‘types’ (to include the most predominant cases of symbolic, iconic and indexical usage) under the standard general headings of film construction (as outlined in section 2.1.2) as genre, mise-en-scène (organisation of space, framing, intertextuality, light and colour), camera techniques (angles, distance, point of view) and montage (juxtaposition, temporal changes, pace and piecing together), together with applicable notes on music and sounds (see section 4.3). Of course, differentiated features may pertain to more than one category, such as a signifier of genre emphasised in the composition of a scene by a particular camera angle and juxtaposed through montage with subsequent forms. In these cases, signifiers were classified under the headings most relevant to the form’s function and signification. In the opening sequence of The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas (Herman, 2008), for example, the screen is dominated by the partial view of a flag in extreme close-up, which transitions to a view of Nazi banners hanging over a square in which a boy is playing freely with his friends. The flag is an historical and ideological symbol, which, in this context, proposes a strong clue to the film’s genre as war film by way of association. The fragmentation of the banner is also synecdochal: a figurative use of the symbol representing a ‘slice of life’ under Nazi rule. This classification is concurrent with Frye’s belief that flags are “metonymic symbols” since they represent inherent and emotive social phenomena (1987: 4–5) (see section 2.1.1). As such, this symbolic construction can be typified as metonymic (of which synecdoches are sometimes grouped as sub-types) under the general category of genre.

To summarise, the collection and analysis of film data was conducted manually treating each film separately as an individual sign system with its own themes and messages, and signifying forms were signalled in various ways (by framing and lighting techniques, camera focus, and so on). Having identified and evaluated these signifiers to gain a fuller
understanding of contextual meaning and potential value, the content of the AD was then scrutinised for appropriateness. Any patterns emerging from this analysis in each or all of the films, in terms of the types of connotational elements observed and the ways in which these have been audio described, were also noted, and examples of signifying types classified under the general headings of genre, mise-en-scène, montage, and camera techniques, with accompanying notes on music and sounds, where relevant, the purpose of classification being to organise the patterns of data to draw more precise conclusions concerning each of the research questions.

3.4.2. Testing of different AD versions

During the second stage of the qualitative study, short segments of audio described film were taken from 4 of the films analysed in the first methodological step (film and AD content analysis) and tested alongside adjusted versions of the same AD on 10 research volunteers (5 visually-impaired and 5 normally-sighted). This test was devised as a small complementary study in support of the main film analysis and as a way of more directly understanding whether film AD containing a larger number of visual signifiers with the potential for secondary-level signification could be processed effectively and equivalently by visually-impaired people. Ultimately, the data was designed to respond to research question 3 concerning the value of visual signifiers for target users, as derived from the responses. Thus, a variety of material prompting different levels of cognitive processing and widening the range of feedback, was required. The clips were, therefore, chosen for their differing audio describers/AD agencies, subject matter, style and different directors. In particular, though, the segments were selected for the number of visual signifiers with potential for connotational meaning that were not transferred in the original AD. To help produce equivalent content for the adjusted versions of AD, translation methods (as outlined in section 2.2.3) were used during this step to reconstruct the visual signifiers in verbal language with a minimal loss of the original messages. The procedures for step 2 of the research methodology are described in more detail below.

As will be shown in the film and AD content analysis (step 1) of this research (see section 4.2), a number of issues were observed in the AD, including partial transfer or complete loss of important referential forms, as well as some substitution of signifiers for signifieds (explicitation). So, brief segments of these audio described films were chosen for qualitative testing alongside adjusted samples of the AD to verify what differences these forms make to AD users. The film clips selected for this study, together with their duration, are shown in table 2.
Table 2: Segments of mainstream film and audio description tested in the full study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Time Codes</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Black Swan</td>
<td>03:20–04:56</td>
<td>1 minute 36 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Brokeback Mountain</td>
<td>00:34–01:00 / 2:01:31–2:02:47</td>
<td>26 seconds / 1 minute 16 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The King’s Speech</td>
<td>00:26–02:00</td>
<td>1 minute 34 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</td>
<td>10:54–12:41</td>
<td>1 minute 47 seconds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Clip 1**

In this segment of film, taken from the beginning of *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010) following the prologue, there is a significant use of mirror imagery, together with a light and dark contrast in the characters’ clothing. There is also a subtle intimation that the young female character in this sequence is bird-like, achieved through the mannerisms of perching on a stool and nibbling at a small breakfast. None of this imagery is reflected in the original AD.

**Clip 2**

The second clip is split into two parts, taken from the immediate opening of *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005) and the film’s final scene. The main reason for this split concerns the contrasting mountain imagery, which overwhelms the screen at the start of the film, but which is so diminished by the end of the feature that only a postcard view remains. This disintegration of the mountain landscape parallels the progression of a love story between the main characters, although this is not discernible from the AD.

**Clip 3**

In the third clip, taken from the beginning of *The King’s Speech* (Hooper, 2011), there is a notable juxtaposition between multiple views of a radio microphone, which dominates the screen, and blurred or off-centre images of the Duke of York at the foot of a staircase, blocked in from the exit route prior to his first public speech. Whilst there is a great deal of information contained in the AD, these aesthetic elements of composition and montage are not included.
Clip 4

The final segment of film, taken from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (Herman, 2008), set in World War II, covers the journey of an SS Officer and his family from Berlin to the Polish countryside when they move house following his promotion to the Commandant of a concentration camp. Whilst certain aspects of connotational imagery are included in the original description of this sequence, including the personification of a stone eagle and the sinister nature of the new house, the theme of entrapment, which is strongly conveyed in the separation and framing of one of the characters behind the tall, dark balusters of the hall stairs, is completely lost in the AD.

To test the value of the missing visual imagery against responses to the sequences of film AD without them, the original sets of audio description were adjusted in very simple ways, also keeping to the timeframes available in the soundtrack (see appendix 1 for timings and adjustments). These adjustments included the addition of stylistic and thematic imagery, such as the contrasting colours and multiple mirrors of *Black Swan*; the disappearance of the mountain from the beginning to the end of *Brokeback Mountain*; the multiple views of the radio microphone and the position of characters blocking an 'exit' sign in *The King's Speech*; and the framing of the boy behind the ‘bars’ of a staircase in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. During these adjustments, the opportunity was taken to emphasise some of the other visual imagery in subtle ways to improve the salience of the forms described, including the attentiveness of the mother figure in clip 1; the cross-like telegraph poles in clip 2; and the looming of the house over the boy, and the type of car driven in clip 4 (together with a correction made to who is driving). The signification behind these various connotational forms are detailed more fully under the individual film analyses in chapter 4.

In transferring the visual imagery in the adjusted AD versions, a formal translation (F-E) model was adopted. As detailed in section 2.2.3, the reasons for this is that F-E translation is “source-orientated”, conserving the original forms, source ‘grammar’ and contextual meanings (Nida, 1964: 165). Where the visual forms in film viewing are concrete and cannot be exchanged for alternative forms in AD, visual subjects and objects were, therefore, exchanged for nouns, colours by adjectives, and so on, whilst bearing in mind the “semantic dimension” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 47) of the images, such as might be interpreted from their analogical and associative constructions. In an extract from clip 1 (*Black Swan*) (03:39–03:45), for example, the original AD reads:
In the living room, she stretches out hands and one foot on the floor, the other straight up in the air. She sits and manipulates her ankle.

During this part of the clip, whilst the AD conveys the general actions of the young woman, there is no mention of the mirrors in the living room nor of the fleeting, yet sinister reflection of a figure in black (to whom the sighted audience has not yet been introduced) passing behind the ballerina. In the adjusted AD, these elements have been added:

In the living room, she stretches in front of three full-length mirrors. A figure in black passes behind her. She sits and manipulates her ankle.

Here, the most important signifiers are (i) the mirrors, which have replaced some of the stretching activities performed by the character in the original AD, and (ii) the dark figure, added in a new sentence. With an additional word count of just two words, this adjusted text incorporates the mirror motif (indexical of duality and a fractured self-image, as well as analogous with the mirror stage in psychoanalysis and the ontological view of a cinema screen), together with the black/white dichotomy, which goes on to permeate the film.

A further example from the extracts adjusted is taken from clip 3 (The King’s Speech) (01:18–01:22). In the original AD:

He dabs at his mouth with a linen napkin. A man approaches Bertie.

This extract of AD accompanies two separate shots, moving from the view of a confident-looking man in a radio studio preparing to make an announcement, to a view of the Duke of York looking anxious in a static position at the bottom of a staircase as a man appears at the top of the stairs. Whilst the AD incorporates the juxtaposition in a straightforward description of the action at different locations (established previously in the film/AD), of greatest concern is the loss of connotation in this description, which was achieved visually through the positioning of the Duke of York and the man approaching him. This has been added to the adjusted AD with an additional word count of six, although keeping within the timeframe available:

He dabs at his mouth with a linen napkin. A man addresses Bertie from the top of the staircase.
Here, signification centres around the staircase, which serves as a vector pointing directly towards the crowded stadium where the Duke must make a speech, and, therefore, as a ‘mountain’ that he must climb, suggesting a huge psychological burden associated with his act of public speaking (in direct comparison to the confidence of the man at the radio station). In the first moments of the film, this indexical form is important in building tension through the subliminal and thematic association of fear and public speech, before the Duke’s speech impediment is revealed as he begins to address the crowd.

The final preparation for the AD audio tests involved the re-recording of the original AD and the recording of the adjusted versions to be played with the film clips. As explained in section 3.2, this was done using Camtasia software (from TechSmith.com) rather than the standard ADePT program (from Softel Ltd), which had limited laptop functionality. The reason for the re-recording of the original AD was to limit any bias towards a particular AD voice and to ensure that the participants did not guess whether some of the AD had been adjusted, which might have affected their responses (being more positive towards the adjusted forms, for example, in trying to support the predicted research outcomes).

Following the recruitment of the 5 visually-impaired and 5 sighted participants (profiled in section 3.3), the formal procedures used to test the audio samples consisted of the following steps:

(i) The participants were asked to allow about 45 minutes to an hour for their individual session (although the duration of the tests ultimately depended upon the length of the responses, so was much longer in some cases). At the beginning of each session, the participant was advised that their responses would be recorded, but that they would be used anonymously in an AD research project concerning films, the aims of which were not discussed until after the semi-structured interview. Consent to the recording was obtained verbally before commencement of the test and followed up by email in all but one case where email exchange was not possible.

(ii) Next, the clips were introduced by film name and with a minimum of context, also indicating whether the clip was from the start or end of each film, and so on. The subjects were asked if they had seen the films before, and the clips were then played in the order shown in Table 3, alternating the original and adjusted AD between subjects to increase the randomness of the results (as distinguished by participants receiving the clips either by ‘order 1’ or ‘order 2’), and allowing pauses at the end of each clip for the recording of feedback.
Table 3: Sequence of audio clips tested in the full study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Order 1</th>
<th>Order 2</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Black Swan</td>
<td>No AD</td>
<td>No AD</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Black Swan</td>
<td>Original AD</td>
<td>Adjusted AD</td>
<td>5 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Black Swan</td>
<td>Full AV version (no AD)</td>
<td>Full AV version (no AD)</td>
<td>Sighted only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Brokeback Mountain</td>
<td>No AD</td>
<td>No AD</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Brokeback Mountain</td>
<td>Original AD</td>
<td>Adjusted AD</td>
<td>5 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Brokeback Mountain</td>
<td>Full AV version (no AD)</td>
<td>Full AV version (no AD)</td>
<td>Sighted only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The King’s Speech</td>
<td>No AD</td>
<td>No AD</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The King’s Speech</td>
<td>Adjusted AD</td>
<td>Original AD</td>
<td>5 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The King’s Speech</td>
<td>Full AV version (no AD)</td>
<td>Full AV version (no AD)</td>
<td>Sighted only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</td>
<td>No AD</td>
<td>No AD</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</td>
<td>Adjusted AD</td>
<td>Original AD</td>
<td>5 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</td>
<td>Full AV version (no AD)</td>
<td>Full AV version (no AD)</td>
<td>Sighted only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(iii) Each clip began with an audio version without AD as a baseline for noting how auditory signifiers (dialogue, music and sounds) might be understood and the differences that AD can make. The different subjects were then played the audio clips with original AD or adjusted AD in alternation (as per Table 3). It should be noted that, according to Chmiel and Mazur, repeated exposure to experimental clips in AD tests is methodologically ‘weak’ (referring specifically to the RNIB’s study of AD for Bollywood films) since the participants' knowledge is naturally increased per exposure (2012: 59). This weakness was minimised in this study by only playing one AD version for each film to each of the participants.

(iv) Finally, the sighted participants were shown the full AV version without AD at the end of the test as a useful way of understanding norms in visual viewing from which to draw equivalences in AD and learn whether important signifying forms are any more apparent visually (although it was accepted that much of the imagery would be absorbed subconsciously during viewing).

How the feedback was specifically generated in the audio testing involved a process of simple questioning. The participants were asked what they could visualise from (a) the original soundtrack (dialogue and music) only, and (b) from the AD and original soundtrack combined, as opposed to simply retelling the story, which, in the pilot study, was found to generate data concerning linear sequences of events rather than more static conceptualisations. The participants were further prompted with questions concerning the characters and environments and how the music made them feel, with the aim of drawing
out meanings and opinions held at a more subconscious level and to generate feedback in specific areas. To help the participants “develop information” (Weiss, 1994: location 1426 of 4574) in the specific areas of study, further questions were used as prompts during the feedback for each clip. For *Black Swan*, the participants were asked (a) who was in the clip, (b) what they could say about (i) the girl and (ii) her mother and (c) if any other imagery could be identified. For *Brokeback Mountain*, they were asked (a) what the first clip told them about the landscape, (b) what the second clip told them about the landscape, and (c) what change, if any, there was in the music and atmosphere from the first scene to the final scene. For *The King's Speech*, they were asked (a) what they could say about the radio microphone, (b) what they could say about Bertie, the Duke of York, (c) what comparison they could make between Bertie and the radio announcer, and (d) what they could say about the other characters and the environment. For *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, they were asked (a) what they could say about the car, (b) what they could say about the house, (c) what they could say about the girl, and (d) what they could say about how the boy, Bruno, might be feeling. All of these questions related to specific visual connotations and were straightforward enough not to add pressure to the test conditions or lead the participants unduly. The sighted participants were also briefly asked what they could say in comparison when shown the full AV version of the clips without AD at the end. Finally, it was hypothesised that many of the responses would be analogous, due to a shared understanding of language and since the reading of an image can be “connected more or less consciously by the public that consumes it to a traditional stock of signs” (Barthes, 1977: 19).

The overall aim of this methodological step, which was a predominantly auditory exercise, although understandings were explored across both the audio and visual channels for the purpose of comparison, was to determine the value of signifying forms in film AD. Value could be estimated against the meaning potential of different signifiers and the subjects’ feedback on these sign forms. However, due to the generally covert nature of signifying content in mainstream films, despite degrees of emphasis that make intended meanings more apparent, this exercise could not fully determine the subjects’ response to all of the semiotic content. The comparison between original and adjusted forms of AD could also not fully explore equivalences in the capacity for mental modelling between visually-impaired and sighted people. A supplementary study, in the form of the semi-structured interview, was, therefore, required to determine response to sign forms that might normally be processed subconsciously and to gain additional data on the value of signs that could be compared between visually-impaired and sighted viewers.
3.4.3. **Semi-structured interview**

To complement the qualitative information gathered during the AD testing exercise and to more directly respond to research question 3 concerning the value of visual signifiers in film AD for target users, semi-structured interviews were conducted on a small scale with each of the 10 participants from the AD sample test. These interviews were qualitative, with the aim of gathering primary data on the participants' "external and internal experiences" (Weiss, 1994: location 1394 of 4574), which, in terms of this research, related to their general experiences as consumers of films (including audio described films), to their thoughts on film construction, and to their psychological processing of imagery. The procedures for the semi-structured interviews are outlined in more detail below.

The semi-structured interviews took place immediately following the individual audio tests conducted at each of the respondents' homes. It was felt that face-to-face interviews, as opposed to a questionnaire mailing, would be more accessible to visually-impaired respondents and would encourage more spontaneous, detailed and, therefore, qualitative, results. Moreover, the reason for ordering the interview after the AD test was to avoid the participants thinking in detail about technical and cultural contexts in film viewing before listening to the audio clips, since this may have made the subject of the research more obvious and biased the results. Again, confidentiality was assured at the outset of each session and although the interviews were voice-recorded, this was done only in backup of the written notes taken at the time.

During the semi-structured interviews, a selection of open and closed-ended questions designed to learn about the participants' sight conditions, interests, film viewing habits, preferences, and understanding of imagery were asked (see appendix 2 for the question structure). This was to enable a broader understanding of their background, preferences and comprehension and to elicit a number of briefer, more focussed responses concerning the processing of imagery, which could be directly compared between subjects. To this end, it was considered appropriate to include “precategorized” questions, since these allow the direct comparison of data items (Weiss, 1994: location 131 of 4574), such as between the responses of the sighted and non-sighted participants and between the 10 individuals as a whole. However, “open-ended” questions were also included since these produce more qualitative (non-standardised) information (Weiss, 1994: location 145 of 4574). In addition to the general profile of each participant, including sight conditions and age of onset, where applicable, the interview structure included questions regarding
Viewing Habits; Audio Description (visually-impaired subjects only); Film Construction; Film Music; Product Placement; Film Scenarios; and Film Stills (sighted subjects only), the aims of which are now outlined:

1. **Viewing Habits.** All of the participants were asked how often they watch films, what types of films they prefer and whether they access the ‘extras’, such as the director’s commentary, on DVDs. This was to establish the extent to which they are experienced in film viewing and interested in how films are made, so as to gain insight into how they might respond to and value film imagery. The visually-impaired participants were also asked a question concerning the act of film viewing itself: “Do you talk about ‘watching’ films and what you’ve ‘seen’, or do you use different words?”, which was simply to check the appropriateness of the phrase ‘watching films’ used extensively in this research, including in reference to visually-impaired spectators.

2. **Audio Description** (visually-impaired subjects only). The 5 visually-impaired subjects were asked their experiences of AD, what they like about it and what they believe could be done differently, as well as whether they need to seek further clarification of what they are viewing with AD enabled. This was to learn their thoughts on quality, particularly now that AD is better established and users may be more experienced. These subjects were also asked how they create mental images (from visual memory or experience, for example) and their opinions on the inclusion of colours and metaphors in AD. These questions were designed to understand the process of mental conceptualisation for people with VI and whether this is assisted by different language forms.

3. **Film Construction.** All of the respondents were asked whether they are interested in the ways in which films are constructed, such as framing and camera angles, and the iconicity created by well-known actors, visual clues, title graphics, credits and intertextual references. These questions were designed to elicit opinions concerning popular film on a level other than ‘first level story’. The subjects were also asked their understanding of the expressions ‘fades to black’ (commonly denotive of the end of a scene or film), ‘in flashback’ (a cut to show a period in the diegetic past or in a character’s memory), ‘grainy footage’ (a technique used to place a sequence in the distant past or to convey the realism of documentary footage), and ‘cross-cut’ (a cut during a scene to simultaneous action happening in a different location). This question aimed to measure the extent to which such phrases could be easily associated with the common techniques of mainstream film, particularly by visually-impaired spectators.
4. **Film Music.** The questions of whether film music contributes to the participants’ understanding and emotive responses and whether signature tunes and musical motifs add anything to film viewing, were also put to the 10 participants. The aim of these questions was to understand the value of music signifiers in the creation of meaning and response.

5. **Product Placement.** All of the respondents were asked their opinion on product placement; that is, whether brand name products, including technology brands, vehicle makes and food and drink manufacturers, are of interest to them during viewing. This question sought to learn whether advertising signs are of value in film viewing, with equivalent value in AD.

6. **Film Scenarios.** To gauge the conventionality of cultural and filmic codes and better understand which types of sign forms are more easily understood, the participants were asked to make word associations from a number of short verbal scenarios with limited contexts (although further context was sometimes given after their initial responses to understand if their conceptualisations would alter). These scenarios were taken directly from the mainstream films previewed in the pilot study (although were not transcribed from the original AD) and included a mixture of commonplace and abstract imagery; the scenario: “A couple split by a large crack that appears in the floor”, taken from the film 2012 (Emmerich, 2009), for example. This section was designed to learn whether denotational meanings or analogies and associations are more commonly formed in response to visual imagery, through a more focussed and conscious approach free from the distractions of other soundtrack elements in the film scenes.

7. **Film Stills.** Finally, the sighted participants were asked what they could see in a number of still images taken from the mainstream films previewed or analysed in the full study. The aim of this section was simply to reinforce whether imagery could be meaningful to viewers on a connotative level, particularly imagery that may or may not have been transferred in the original AD. This section was designed to concentrate the sighted subjects’ attention on the imagery free from audio and movement, to help bring conscious awareness to signifiers that might ordinarily be processed subconsciously.

The sections of the semi-structured interview were intended to prompt qualitative yet comparable responses to film construction, film imagery and AD. The progression of the interview from general background questions to questions on technical constructions, music and product placement, ending with connotative scenarios and film stills, was intended to direct the respondents from the reporting of general information to the
provision of qualitative data concerning film imagery that could be used to determine the value of imagery and seek equivalences between visual and non-visual perspectives. In this case, although it should be noted that a “fixed-question-open-response” interviewing style is less free (Weiss, 1994: location 327 of 4574), this method helped to “systematize the collection of qualitative material and facilitate [its] quantitative treatment” (Weiss, 1994: location 344 of 4574). Additionally, since the signification of signs is often covert, meaning must somehow be “elicited” (Berger, 1991: 10). Thus, in order to successfully respond to research question 3 in relation to the value of signs in AD, it was necessary to elicit the meaning potential of forms via a question structure that brought the techniques of film construction to the forefront.

During their individual interviews, the subjects were encouraged with phatic remarks, which instils confidence in subjects that their responses are useful (Weiss, 1994: location 263 of 4574), but they were not engaged in any discussion of their feedback, as this may have influenced the direction of their responses. Shortly following each interview, emails (or a card in the case of the participant without email contact) were sent to thank the subjects for their participation. No follow-up sessions were held since further demand on the volunteers’ time was considered unnecessary and inappropriate.

3.5. Conclusion

The aim of this methodological framework was to identify the types of sign forms present in audio described films available in the UK, to determine their semiotic purpose, and evaluate their availability in the audio description together with their ability to help visually-impaired people construct mental imagery on an equivalent basis to sighted spectators. Observation provides context (Berger, 2011: 138) and to this end, the substantive frame of (i) the film and AD content analysis, (ii) the testing of original and adjusted versions of AD, and (iii) the semi-structured interviewing of respondents, sought to generate targeted data in respect of all of the research questions. First, the visual forms considered important to connotational significance and their most ‘obvious’ interpretations, were revealed through a discursive analysis of 10 mainstream films treated separately as individual sign systems, before an overview was made of the data patterns observed. This step also directly uncovered the relations between the AD and the visual imagery and the extent to which these texts appropriately include connotational form. In turn, this stage of analysis allowed suppositions to be made in respect of the value of semiotic content for AD users, as largely determined by its additional potential for meaning. The subsequent testing of original and adjusted samples of AD in methodological step 2, facilitated the
collection of primary data concerning what could be visualised and easily understood from semiotic content. This data, together with feedback on viewer preferences and the comprehension of visual scenarios, elicited through semi-structured interviews in methodological step 3 of this research, comprised the results of a small complementary study designed to more directly clarify the value of visual form for actual consumers of film AD.

Finally, the risk of variables that might have inhibited the results were minimised in the different approaches. Where content was analysed from a varied corpus of audio described films (from different directors and audio describers), more definite conclusions could be drawn in respect of data patterns, including common techniques in sign-making and tendencies in audio description. Moreover, the audio samples of original and adjusted AD, taken from 4 different films, were randomised between the participants to limit bias, with simple, probing questions asked after each clip to focus the participants’ attention on stylistic imagery as opposed to elements of ‘first level story’. Although the audio test subjects were not consciously aware of all of the coded messages implanted in the extracts of AD, so were not inclined to include some of them during feedback, this test was supplemented by a semi-structured interview designed to engage the same subjects in a more conscious discussion of film construction, including a word association section with a number of verbalised scenarios. Response and emotional reactions to films and AD and the understanding of imagery may vary considerably between different people, but the semi-structured interview in a comparable, ‘fixed-question-open-response’ format, lent itself not only to the understanding of individual image perception, but to how conceptualisations might coincide with collective norms.

To recall the aims of this research, the above methodological stages sought to clarify whether the signifying forms important to secondary (connotational) significance are integral to mainstream films and if their inclusion in film AD could improve equivalence in this type of translation, providing target users with access to films to a greater extent. To develop this hypothesis, data was gathered progressively across the different areas pertaining to each research question, building from the comprehension of stylistic content in a detailed qualitative analysis, to direct methods of cognitive testing with respondents. The qualitative results produced from these different approaches are laid out in chapters 4 and 5.
4. Qualitative Analysis of Film and AD Data

4.1. Introduction

It has been noted that signifying forms of first level significance are prioritised in film AD, including elements of character appearance, location and action (see Piety, 2004; and Salway, 2007). Although some of this AD will, by default, include signifiers that might be ‘read’ on a connotative level (certain colours, objects and environments, for example), it has been hypothesised that the more stylistic forms of mainstream film pertaining to second-level significance may be marginalised in AD transfer. In response to each of the research questions, aiming (i) to identify and comprehend the visual forms important to connotational significance in film, (ii) to explore whether these features are appropriately expressed in film AD, and (iii) to establish the value of this content for the target audience, this chapter presents the findings from the first methodological step, which comprised a discursive qualitative analysis of film and AD content from 10 mainstream films. The data gathered from each of these films, as individual semiotic systems, is discussed in detail in section 4.2, with the data patterns observed across all of the films summarised in section 4.3 under the general categories of genre, mise-en-scène, camera techniques, montage, and music and sounds.

Before proceeding with the film analysis, however, it is first worth commenting on the potential issue of subjective interpretation that could arise in a study of this type. The language of film is “complex”, with its own “rules and conventions” (Chaume, 2004: online) and in the culture of mainstream film (as opposed to World Cinema or Art House productions), audiences have become familiar with the rules and conventions that direct them to the significance of works in different contexts through the use of common techniques, themes, narrative outcomes and cultural features, together with the salience of expressive content. So, although the content of mainstream films may be interpreted differently by individuals, it is also commonly interpreted at the ‘collective’ level (Phillips, 2000: 8). The overriding principle of this study, however, is that semiotic content is intended to express something to audiences, and so regardless of how this might ultimately be interpreted, it needs first to be present in AD for visually-impaired audiences to have the same opportunities to process the message.
4.2. Analysis of film and AD content

This section comprises an extensive discursive analysis of the content and AD from 10 mainstream English language, British and American films available on UK DVD, and explores the potential for AD to achieve equivalence for diverse visual imagery in verbal form. These films were chosen as representing a small cross-section of popular material produced by different directors and various AD agencies and audio describers. And the qualitative analysis presents each of them separately, as an individual sign system with its own themes and messages, identifying and evaluating the visual signifiers for meaning and assessing their handling in the AD texts (as outlined in section 3.4.1 of the methodology). The discussion of the data collected is loosely structured around the narrative themes that correspond with the propositional imagery, which was considered an important first step in understanding the semiotic content of mainstream films as it may naturally be ‘read’ during AD production, before the more specific organisation of data under common headings of film construction could take place (see section 4.3). Despite originality in the construction of films and notwithstanding the covertness or vagueness of many visual forms, it was expected that many would still be fairly “obvious” (although not necessarily explicit) (see Barthes, 1977: 56), as discussed in section 2.1.2. It was also expected that different signifiers might be used to express similar things, which is consistent with the need for filmmakers to offer new yet interpretable material through the use of familiar techniques. Thus, the overall aim of this methodological step was to demonstrate the significance of diverse connotational features, highlighting where important imagery might be simply and appropriately incorporated in film AD, and ultimately demonstrating the potential value for AD users.

Film 1 – The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas (Herman, 2008)

Miramax Films / BBC Films / Heyday Films
Audio Description written by Daniel Coonan and Alan Blighton and voiced by Alan Blighton of IMS

Themes in The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas relate to the contrasting worlds in and outside of a concentration camp. The symbolism centres around the innocence and freedom of a young boy, Bruno, the son of a German officer who is sheltered from the realities of World War II, with an undercurrent of Nazism and confinement. As the film progresses, there are subtle indications of change in the characters’ personae as they become influenced by events, and Bruno’s life begins to mirror that of the Jewish boy, Shmuel, whom he befriends at the camp.
The Nazi insignia and emblems

Despite the child’s naivety, there are reminders throughout the film that Bruno’s life is influenced by the events of war. Parts of a flag dominate the screen in the title sequence, which transitions to a shot of Nazi Party banners hanging from a building in a Berlin square where the main character is first observed. By association, the swastika (a traditional ideological symbol (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2006: 1852) ) on the Nazi flag offers the audience a strong clue to the genre of film they are watching. The fact that the image is initially fragmented, where the camera is in extreme close-up on one part of the banner, also gives the impression of size, where it both literally and figuratively dominates the screen. The flag is, therefore, synecdochal, representing life under Nazi rule. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Behind the titles, corners of the black and white swastika emblem on a red banner flutter into view.

(01:08–01:12)

[Images removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Three rectangular Nazi banners hang from the balcony of a grand, white stuccoed public building. In front of it a sprinkling of people wander across a rain-soaked square. Four young boys come careering through with their arms held out to the sides like the wings of fighter planes. People smile as the boys run between the tables of a crowded alfresco café [boys heard making plane sounds].

(01:17–01:37)
Although the emblem and colours of the banner are audio described in this sequence, the size of the banners cannot be fully appreciated, and although a simile is included in the AD to show that Bruno and his friends are imitating aeroplanes, four adjectives are used to describe the building in the square, while there is an absence of contrast between the regimented and raised image of the banners hanging over their innocent play.

An allusion to the red and white of the Nazi flag occurs later in the film also when Bruno is shown against a red and white entranceway waiting for his father, with a vertical line behind him, which appears to 'cut' directly into his head like a puppet string. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

Father: Come in.
AD: Bruno goes through into his father's dimly-lit, stark office.

(15:42–15:46)

The implicit colour motif of the flag is not audio described, and whilst there is little time for AD in this segment, the audio describer has chosen to describe the office where the characters have not yet moved to rather than the compositional arrangement of the shots in the hallway.

Another emblem of the regime carrying important symbolic features is the Nazi officer's uniform worn by Bruno's father. Symbols on uniforms are said to be 'cohesive' and conforming, as well as indicative of social rank (Cirlot, 2001: location 7026 of 9304). Consequently, there is little doubt of the father's authoritative rank when he first appears in his General's uniform near the start of the film. In the AD:
AD: The gathered guests stop talking as Bruno’s father descends the staircase in his general’s uniform. / [Applause and “Heil Hitler” heard]. Military men amongst the guests direct Nazi salutes towards him. / Bruno looks back at his sister, who’s smiling proudly with their mother as their father solemnly comes down the stairs with his cap tucked under his arm. / Near the bottom of the stairs, he stops and gives his guests the Nazi salute, a silver SS insignia on his collar catching the light. He joins the admiring throng shaking hands with some and raising eyebrows at others as he comes in through the crowd.

(06:29–07:06)

This AD refers to the “silver SS insignia on his collar catching the light”, which draws an appropriate level of attention to this signifier, and to the General’s ‘solemn’ descent to the party, stopping to give the Nazi salute, which conveys the elevated position synonymous with his rank and his strong affiliation with the regime. Later, there is a close-up of a skull and bones insignia, or Totenkopf, on his collar, which, in this context, is indexical of the father’s status as a member of the Totenkopf Division of the SS (see Encyclopædia Britannica, 2013b). In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

Bruno: Why do the farmers wear pyjamas? I can see them from my window.
AD: Father, wearing his SS uniform with a death-head insignia sewn onto the front of the tunic collar, looks away from Bruno pursing his lips.
Father: The thing is, Bruno, those people… you see they’re not really people at all.

(16:12–16:33)
This AD explicitly names the “SS uniform”, which explains, by association, the “death-head insignia” on the collar. The description of clothing also successfully complements and contrasts with Bruno’s question concerning the clothing that the “farmers” (prisoners) wear in the death camp.

A further indexical clue to the Commandant’s nature and to the sinister nature of the family’s new house in the country as a seat of Reich activity, is the presence of a large, black statue of an eagle above the gates. The eagle is an archetypal symbol (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2006: 98) and a common emblem on many national coats of arms, including the Reichsadler of Imperial Germany and the Nazi Party flag (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2013a). It has been used as a symbol of freedom, of imperial and patriarchal power (Cirlot, 2001: location 2682 of 9304) and war (Cirlot, 2001: location 2661 of 9304; Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2006: 586). In one scene, the picture fades from the face of the Commandant to the eagle, juxtaposing the images with the effect of expressing that the soldier and the eagle (the regime) are one and the same. This type of suggestive editing, which produces an iconic metaphor, does not feature in the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: From one of the pillars of the courtyard gates, the stone eagle looks out with its wings held high.

(17:42–17:47)

Despite the vivid personification in the AD of the eagle “looking out”, this is not the same as the embodiment of the Commandant with nationalist ideals, as observed in the fade from the man’s image to the eagle, so although the action is described linearly, moving from the Commandant’s office to the courtyard, the same level of depth is not achieved. Of course, the inclusion of technical effects in AD is contentious since this constitutes self-referentiality by drawing attention to films as constructed media. So, where the intention of a visual effect is to express meaning subtly through juxtaposition, there is a degree of adequacy in the straightforward description of successive elements only.
A further example of juxtaposition, this time indexical of the privilege and rank of the officer, appears in the opening sequence. The opulence of life for the family of a high ranking officer is shown in a sequence of simultaneous shots, of silverware, cut glass, the activity of servants and the grand interior of a house. There is no dialogue as the action cuts from Bruno and his friends running past soldiers loading people into trucks, to a shot of his mother being helped to descend from a more comfortable vehicle, to a scene featuring further arrests. This metonymic montage of imagery illustrates the sharp contrast between the free and comfortable lifestyle of the officer’s family and that of the people arrested. The AD of this sequence adequately and implicitly conveys the important features of montage and composition:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

**AD:** Inside a high-ceilinged house, crystal glasses are being polished. Two elderly men roll up a carpet together. Behind them a maid sweeps the varnished wooden floor. Silverware is arranged on a tray.

(01:38–01:47)

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

**AD:** The four boys dash down a street past a truck full of huddled people

(01:55–01:58)
AD: A chauffeur opens the door of an open-topped car and an elegant young brunette gets out. She takes a gift box from him and hurries towards the large house which has a gated entry and a portico of four white columns framing the front door.

(02:01–02:14)

AD: The four boys, arms still outstretched, run past a truck and a soldier forcibly pushing a woman in a head scarf towards it. Other people carrying suitcases are also being herded onto the back. Beyond the truck soldiers are leading families away from a tenement building past a barking Alsatian on a lead [barks heard].

(02:57–03:15)

In the absence of dialogue, each piece of AD in this sequence is important in creating contrasts and syntagmatic linkage, which is achieved simply and successfully via a straightforward description of the action.

_Gretel’s evolution_

The penultimate image in the above sequence contrasts with a shot of Bruno’s sister, Gretel, in a luxurious bedroom playing with dolls, which is further illustrative of the family’s wealth, but also of the girl’s immaturity. In the AD:
In a bedroom, a young teenage blonde girl is sitting on the floor surrounded by her dolls.

(03:25–03:30)

This AD adequately alludes to the girl's youth and to the object of play, as well as making an implicit Aryan reference in the description of her hair colour.

The increasing influence of nationalist ideology on the Commandant's daughter is expressed in motifs permeating the film. For instance where Gretel is shown smiling as she looks through magazines with soldiers on the cover, and in a further scene where she is reading a copy of the Nazi weekly, *Illustrierter Beobachter (Illustrated Observer)*. The nature of the magazines and Gretel's pleasure in reading them are omitted from the AD (although a further signifier indexical of the Aryan stock is included in a reference to the soldier's eyes):

AD: He sits up and watches Gretel looking through some magazines with the young soldier with the pale blue eyes.

(21:15–21:19)

AD: In Gretel's bedroom, Bruno stands on a chair looking out of a window. Gretel lies on her bed reading.

(27:45–27:48)

Attention is further drawn to Gretel's immaturity by her clutch of dolls on arrival at their new house, which is included in the AD, and also later in her room:
From her room, Gretel playing with her many dolls sees her mother peering through the slatted window in Bruno’s bedroom.

(15:25–15:30)

According to Cirlot, dolls can symbolise “an infantile state” (2001: location 2516 of 9304). So, when Bruno is later startled by an immense stack of dolls discarded in the cellar, audio described as “hundreds of undressed children’s dolls piled up several feet high”, this appropriately conveys the symbolic throwing off of childish ways as Gretel matures and becomes increasingly fanatical. More sinisterly, the stack of dolls in the dark cellar is an allegory, being synonymous with the piling of bodies, which foreshadows the film’s final events and is deeply reflective of the Holocaust. As such, this is an important reference in the AD.

Bruno’s journey

In contrast to his sister, Bruno remains ‘in the dark’ concerning Nazism. For example, he only half-heartedly reads his tutor’s German almanac for the period prior to the start of WWII (the title, *Deutscher Almanach*, but not the dates of the book are audio described). Yet there are clues throughout the film to the increasing influence of Nazism on his life. For example, in his allegorical ‘transportation’ on the train that moves the family from Berlin to the Polish countryside where he is shown lying down, unmoving in striped pyjamas with the shadow of ladder rungs, like bars, moving across his body (also notably framing his mother at one point). Such mirroring of the boy’s life with that of Shmuel, the
boy in striped uniform that he will meet at the perimeter of the camp, is prevalent in John Boyne’s novel of the same title (2006) on which the film is based. In the AD of the train journey:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: In their compartment Mother smiles up at Gretel. Bruno, in striped pyjamas, is sleeping with his head on his father’s lap.

(10:36–10:42)

The subtle motif of the striped pyjamas, which is suggestive of the film’s title and foreshadows Bruno’s wearing of an actual camp uniform, is successfully audio described, although there are no indications of the ‘bars’ that cross his body or frame his mother as she files her nails serenely on a bunk bed.

Upon arrival at their new house near the camp, there is a scene in which Bruno is again shown behind bars, this time of the staircase in the hallway, which creates the subliminal suggestion of imprisonment. In the scene’s composition, the horizontal line of a shelf also runs behind Bruno, which along with the upward diagonal of the staircase, forms a vector pointing directly at the child’s head. This scene is preceded by the camera’s surveying, from Bruno’s perspective, of the austere Bauhaus architecture of the house, which makes the building appear to loom over the small boy. According to Cirlot: “The outside of the house signifies the outward appearance of Man: his personality or his mask” (2001: location 3850–3869 of 9304), with the features of a building seldom taken as denotative of its constructed materials, but rather as signifiers of meaning (Danesi, 1999: 141). In this case, the forbidding features of the house are synonymous with the grim and serious nature of the father who has brought them here, and is, therefore, a sign of what Bruno’s life will become within its perimeters. In the AD:
AD: As the car drives into the bare gravelled courtyard soldiers shut the gates behind it. Above their heads a stone eagle with outspread wings watches them from the top of one of the gateposts. The family get out of the car and look up at the house / Bruno looks at the tall, leaded windows and forbidding grey façade / Inside he sits on the stairs. The interior is all white walls and dark wooden fittings. The entrance hall is bare.

(11:37–12:01)

The use of the words “forbidding grey façade” in this description and the contrast of the dark/white interior and minimal décor convey the hostile feel of the building, attributing it with an institutional atmosphere. The AD is ineffective, however, in expressing Bruno’s separation from his family behind the tall dark balusters, like a trapped bird in a cage, so the value of this imagery is lost.

Later in the film, it is Bruno’s mother who will be framed in close-up behind the balusters, her normally well-groomed hair now dishevelled after she discovers the truth about the camp, which is a sign of her psychological deterioration. In the AD, she is described as being “devoid of makeup” (48:34) and her grim expression is noted, but there is no reference to the vertical lines, indexical of her own confinement, which obscure her from view:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Father looks up at his wife who watches grimly from the first floor landing. She turns away.

(1:01:10–1:01:15)
The horizontal slats of window shutters also obscure Bruno in close-up as he peers for the first time at the concentration camp. This obscured view of the outside world, as well as the boy’s distance from it, are connotational of his naïve perception of the world and sheltered existence. Windows themselves are said to bear a sense of communication, representing “the possibility of understanding and of passing through to the external and the beyond” (Cirlot, 2001: location 6191 of 9304). In this respect, the shutters in this imagery become metaphorical, representing a barrier to understanding and communication. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: As Maria leaves the room, he peers through the wooden slats, his attention caught by something in the distance. Unblinking, he focuses his eyes on some outbuildings which lie at the far end of a field partly obscured by the tall dense trees in front of the house.

(13:52–14:05)

This sense of a barrier between Bruno and the realities of the outside world is adequately conveyed in this AD of Bruno’s face behind the window slats and of the distant and “partly obscured” buildings he observes.

Windows feature frequently in this film. And it is through a window above the closed door of his father’s study, for example, that Bruno watches a propaganda film of the camp. He is separated from his father’s world, as well as elevated above it in this scene; a tiny face framed in a window that appears swastika-shaped in the angle and framing of the shot. In the AD:
AD: Bruno spies through a window.  

(59:49–59:50)

By audio-describing the action, the window is mentioned. However, the powerful effect of the small face in the corner of a ‘swastika-shaped’ frame is lost. This is due in part to the time available in the audio. But this effect of camera also highlights the problem of describing film constructions, particularly when fleeting and difficult to substantiate, since the terms ‘swastika-shaped window’ or ‘broken-cross shaped frame of the window’ would sound literal and unnecessarily complex verbalisations for spectators to process.

When Bruno later climbs out through a window in the shed, this could be considered a point of transition through a gateway to another world. Now running through the woods with his arms outstretched like the wings of a plane, as he once did with his friends in Berlin, this connotes freedom, although outstretched arms might also be associated with martyrdom since he is running towards the concentration camp. Bruno’s transition through the natural environment of the woodland, together with the contrasting ‘slumped’ and ‘forlorn’ body language of the boy, Shmuel, he meets beneath the barbed wire of the camp fence, are successfully conveyed in the AD, which describes this scene in detail in some 380 words over approximately three minutes (29:06–31:50). The AD also includes the young prisoner’s “tatty striped uniform”, which is an important reference to the film’s title and forms a motif, linking with Bruno’s earlier wearing of striped pyjamas on the train and to the uniform he will trade his clothing for when he ventures into the camp.

At the end of the film, as Bruno is herded off with the prisoners, indistinguishable from them in his uniform, his family pursue him through the woods in terror as it starts to thunder and rain, which is both audible and audio described. Cirlot notes that “every fall of rain is tantamount to purification and regeneration, which in turn imply the basic idea of punishment and completion” (2001: location 2408 of 9304). The rain is, therefore, an important iconic signifier synonymous with the end of Bruno’s life in the gas shower. The
shocked realisation on the Commandant’s face in close-up, together with a lingering shot of the oppressive corridor of discarded uniforms as the camera pans out from the closed door of the shower room, are strong reinforcements of this message. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: The door to the shower room remains shut. / Lining the gloomy changing room leading to the locked door dozens of striped camp uniforms hang on pegs and lie on benches. Shabby boots clutter the floor. / Bare bulbs in the ceiling shine down on the silent, ghostly room. / [Long pause] The picture slowly fades to black. (1:25:30–1:26:19)

These short descriptions of the shower room door; “gloomy” lighting; “dozens of striped camp uniforms”; “shabby boots”; and “bare bulbs” successfully capture the haunted atmosphere of the empty room and the connotational messages of death, loss and end. The interjection of pauses in the AD also allows the audience time to reflect on what has happened, particularly during the longer more ‘meaningful’ pause as the camera backs symbolically away before the scene fades out completely. Although the slow retreat of the camera is not audio described, the sense of ending is, therefore, poignant, nevertheless.

Film 2 – The Curious Case of Benjamin Button (Fincher, 2008)

Warner Bros. Pictures / Paramount Pictures / The Kennedy/Marshall Company
Audio Description written by Sam Clark and John Walscol and voiced by Helen Vaisey of ITFC

Based on a short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1922) in which the main character, Benjamin, is born old and grows young, the obvious theme in this film is the passing of time. The film begins at the end of an old woman’s life (Daisy) and flashes back to other periods in her and Benjamin’s past. It is also a complex love story with moments of guilt, realisation and loss, which are subtly reflected in the imagery.
Unity and estrangement

Benjamin and Daisy's friendship begins when Daisy visits her grandmother in an old people's home. They talk about Benjamin's condition beneath a tent of sheets, a candle between them. Unlike unlit candles, which "generally signify things of which society does not approve" (Lehman and Luhr, 2008: 219), a lighted candle (or lamp) is representative of "individuated light, and consequently of the life of an individual" (Cirlot, 2001: location 1598 of 9304). But it also commonly symbolises unity and love, so where it is positioned between Benjamin and Daisy in the composition of this scene, it is strongly indexical of a bond between them. In the AD:

Kneeling beneath the table, Benjamin strikes a match and carefully lights a candle whose warm glow silhouettes them behind the white drapery.

(33:37–33:44)

Reference is made in the AD to the lighted candle, and although it is not described as being between the two friends, the "warm glow [that] silhouettes" them does convey a sense of unity. However, as soon as they are discovered, the candle goes out, which carries a sense of disapproval and, therefore, of shame, but this is not audio described despite adequate time to do so:

Miss Fuller whisks up the sheet, exposing them.

(34:40–34:42)

A subsequent AD does, however, describe Benjamin in shadow with negative body language, which compensates in part for the loss of effect:

Dejected, Benjamin leans out of the den with his head hung. Queenie comes up from the basement in her dressing gown and catches sight of him kneeling in the shadows staring at the floor.

(35:13–35:20)
There is also a lighted candle on the table between Benjamin and his estranged father as the older man talks intimately about his wife’s death, although there is little time in the AD to include this motif:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Later
Thomas: My wife passed away many years ago.
Benjamin: Oh. I’m so, so, so sorry.
Thomas: She died in childbirth.
AD: The bar staff are clearing up. Thomas raises his glass. (47:51–48:04)

When Benjamin’s father later reveals his identity, he is shown in shadows separated from Benjamin who stands in the light. This effect of lighting, like the unlit candle, conveys a sense of the father’s shame in abandoning his son. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

Thomas: Benjamin, you’re my son.
AD: Benjamin stares blankly at Thomas, who stands half-hidden in shadow. (1:33:57–1:34:04)

The way in which this scene is composed is partially conveyed in the AD, and although Benjamin is not described as being in the light, the more important signifier of his father, Thomas, being “half-hidden in shadow”, which creates atmosphere and reflects the man’s psychological state, is included.
Benjamin’s estrangement from his father is also alluded to visually in an intertextual reference to *Ivanhoe* (Scott, 1819). Benjamin’s reading of this romantic adventure story indicates a childish escapism (despite his aged appearance), but Ivanhoe too was estranged from his father before later reconciliation, which foreshadows Benjamin’s own situation. Interestingly, Ivanhoe is also the name of the Australian suburb in which the actress who plays Daisy (Cate Blanchett) grew up (IMDB: online), which could be taken as a referential pun as well as a link between her character and Benjamin. It is, therefore appropriate that the title of this book is included in the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Benjamin's reading *Ivanhoe* in bed.  

(37:16–37:18)

The inclusion of the book’s title in the AD, as opposed to simply stating that Benjamin is reading in bed or reading a comic, is a justified signifier in the context of the film and provides an equivalent opportunity in a straightforward and natural way for the target audience to infer wider meanings from this imagery.

*Benjamin’s transition*

The framing of Benjamin in doorways and windows is also important as a sign of his estrangement from the outside world due to his physical difference. But, in symbology, doors and windows also represent “openings, outlets, hopes of salvation” (Cirlot, 2001: location 769 of 9304). In one scene, Benjamin pauses, framed listening in a doorway for three seconds before passing into the next room and looking out of a window at a gathering outside listening to a visitor (26:55–27:34). He looks again through the window before peeking around the back door, with the camera showing two point of view shots of the crowd. The next image is a point of view shot from a window looking at people chatting on the staircase outside, followed by a shot of Benjamin’s empty wheelchair. During this sequence, the audio description reads as follows:

AD: Benjamin eavesdrops on a conversation.  

(25:41–25:43)
Despite inclusion in the AD of who Benjamin is looking at (Mr Oti), none of the framing in the doors or windows is mentioned, with a subsequent loss of tentativeness, which builds towards Benjamin's first encounter with Mr Oti and the adult world he will introduce him to. Following this, and despite a further ten seconds in which to audio-describe, the shot of Benjamin's empty wheelchair in the shadows, which is also indexical of his growing younger, is not mentioned.

When Oti leaves the home, Benjamin is shown watching him from his bedroom window, which is included in the AD:

AD: Straight-backed and without the use of a cane, Benjamin goes to a window and peers out through narrowed eyes.

However, this time the window is partially open, denoting not only a warm evening, but that barriers may be lifting, although this is not included in the AD. Benjamin is also shown
looking out with an expression that appears more curious, with his head cocked to one side, than the term “narrowed eyes” in the AD would suggest.

When a new baby is born to his adoptive mother, Benjamin is again seen framed in the shadows by a doorway. However, there is no space for AD at this moment, although the film’s voiceover narration explains that something has changed.

*The passing of time*

With the passing of time comes change, so clocks are a prominent motif in this film reminding the audience of this. According to Cirlot, “the clock is related to the notions of ‘perpetual motion’, automata, mechanism and to the magical creation of beings that pursue their own autonomous existence” (2001: location 1828 of 9304). The concept of existence is touched upon in the film’s imagery, with sequences concerning life and death, and flashbacks used as a device to shift between the present and the past. According to Kress and van Leeuwen: “The shape of the reading path itself conveys a significant cultural message” (2006: 205), which, in this case, ensues from the shifting of time; for example, where the story of a soldier’s death, the son of a clockmaker, is recounted. In the AD:

*[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]*

**AD:** In reverse action a fallen soldier stands and runs backwards from an explosion.

(05:10–05:13)

The “reverse action” imagery in this AD represents the clockmaker’s wish for his son to return home from the War or for the event to have never taken place. Subsequently, the grieving clockmaker, Mr Gateau, is said to have rowed out to sea and never returned, which is shown in grainy images as if in an old film or photo, which is also successfully conveyed in the AD:
Moreover, the expressions “grainy footage”, “grainy old footage” and “sepia footage” are used by the audio describer to relate the flashback sequences of old Mr Dawes being hit by lightning several times in his life. This alerts the audience to a movement back in time, but also references the film’s motif of the passage of time, providing structure in the linking of events concerning this character.

The replacement of Mr Gateau's clock in the station, which ran backwards for many years, is another symbol of change over time, but although the old clock has been replaced, the lost soldiers are not forgotten, as indicated by the large American flag hanging over it. In the AD:

Daisy: In 2002, they put up a new clock in that train station.
AD: People mill around on the marble concourse beneath the newly-installed digital clock.

While the “digital clock” is included in the AD, indicating modernisation and change, the flag is not mentioned in the description, with a loss of syntagmatic linkage to the past.

With the passing of time, the residents of the old people’s home also pass on. When the opera singer dies, for example there is a symbolic shot of her empty bedroom. This is not audio described since there is no gap in the film’s voiceover narration. But, the scene that follows of a flag at half-mast, a traditional sign of mourning, is included in the AD:
Narrator: And Death was a common visitor. People came, and went. You always knew when someone left us: there was a silence in the house.

AD: The flag outside flies at half-mast.

(25:02–25:13)

When Benjamin reflects on the fact that getting younger will mean seeing the people he loves die, he looks in a mirror. According to Cirlot (2001: location 4940 of 9304), a mirror is:

a symbol of the imagination—or of consciousness—in its capacity to reflect the formal reality of the visible world. It has also been related to thought, in so far as thought […] is the instrument of self-contemplation as well as the reflection of the universe.

Thus, the composition of this scene shows Benjamin’s contemplation of the physical and metaphysical worlds, which is a metaphorical motif that does not come across in the AD:

AD: Benjamin stares at himself in the mirror.

(53:08–53:10)

Staring at oneself in a mirror seems more denotative of vanity than reflectiveness, so the intention of this signifying imagery is lost.

A further reference to time is made via the tugboat Captain’s hummingbird tattoo. It is not necessary to describe this signifier, however, since the captain explains that the movement of the hummingbird’s wings in a figure of eight represents the mathematical symbol for “infinity” (57:51–58:22). A hummingbird can also fly in reverse, which links this symbolically to the reverse action of Mr Gateau’s clock and to Benjamin’s rejuvenation. Tattoos are also said to show the bearer’s ‘affiliation’ to whatever is signified by each mark (Danesi, 1999: 58–59; Cirlot, 2001: location 7299 of 9304), which, in this case, expresses an affiliation with time. Additionally, birds are said to represent a messenger, Heaven, or the flight of the soul after death (Cirlot, 2001: location 1403 of 9304). The rise of a hummingbird from the sea into the sky after the tugboat Captain’s death is, therefore, strongly indicative of the departure of the man’s soul, as conveyed in the AD of the action:
Benjamin: [Narrating] Death didn’t seem natural.
AD: Watched by a grieving Vick, Benjamin tosses a lifebelt from the Chelsea over the side of the rescue vessel. As it floats in the water, a hummingbird flies past it. The bird flies up and hovers briefly in front of Benjamin then flies off.
Benjamin: [Narrating] I’d never seen a hummingbird that far out to sea. Before or since.

(1:20:29–1:20:54)

Where the AD of the action in this scene includes the hummingbird in flight, it offers an explanation for the signifying form referred to by the narrator. This helps the target audience link this event with other instances of the hummingbird’s appearance, such as at the hospital window when Daisy dies, making it a motif connotational of the soul’s departure. This signifier is captured in the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: A hummingbird appears at the window. Then disappears amidst the torrential downpour. Daisy’s eyes close slowly.

(2:31:20–2:31:27)

In this description, the audio describer does not feel it necessary to state that Daisy has died, but appropriately leaves this for the audience to conclude from the signifying form of the hummingbird.

At the end of the film, the past is symbolically ‘swept away’ as the storage room housing Mr Gateau’s clock is flooded. In the AD:
AD: Floodwaters gush into the train station storeroom sweeping an old office chair into the corner where Mr Gateau’s brass clock lies half-covered by a sheet, the second hand still running backwards.

(2:32:24–2:32:35)

This description appropriately conveys the sense of movement in time with the water washing away the past and the clock abandoned with old furniture, and pointedly includes the detail of the second hand relentlessly turning backwards.

Present day in the story is set in New Orleans in 2005, the year in which Hurricane Katrina left the city “devastated” by floods (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2006: 1352). References are made to this natural disaster in the film, including the name on the back of the tugboat, ‘Chelsea, New Orleans, LA’ (‘Chelsea’ is audio described, but not ‘New Orleans’), and the title of the News broadcast on the hospital room television (audio described). In symbology, there is also the idea that the zenith of a hurricane is like “a void through which one may pass out of the world of space and time into spacelessness and timelessness” (Cirlot, 2001: location 3901 of 9304) and of the counter-clockwise rotation of the tropical cyclone in the northern hemisphere (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2006: 499) (like the reverse action of the hands of Mr Gateau’s clock and the hummingbird’s wings). These references, although more abstract, fit with the central theme of the film and the defiance of a linear existence and so are appropriately included in the AD.

Film 3 – Brokeback Mountain (Lee, 2005)

Alberta Film Entertainment / Focus Features / Good Machine / Paramount Pictures / River Road Entertainment
Audio Description written by James O’Hara and voiced by John Walscol ITFC

Brokeback Mountain is a love story against a backdrop of dramatic mountain countryside. It tells the story of two ranch-hands, Ennis and Jack, who meet in 1963 and develop a life-long relationship, meeting in secret on Brokeback Mountain while leading double lives with
families elsewhere. In the DVD extra entitled *Directing from the Heart* (2005), the director, Ang Lee, explains:

I always like making dramas which is [sic] about conflict. You put different ingredients which is [sic] in conflict with each other, and through which you examine humanity. To me, it is dramatic of course to find Brokeback Mountain so much [sic] big. It is illusive. It is romantic. It is something that... It hits you that you keep wanting to go back.

This compulsion accords with the “eternal quality” of mountains in symbolism as common seats of worship (Jung, 1964: 208). In this way, the obvious themes of this film naturally centre around the life-long draw of the characters to the mountain and to each other, as well as, conversely, to the ideals and social prejudices of the American Mid-West at this time.

*The mountain metaphor*

The vistas at the beginning of *Brokeback Mountain* are vast and beautiful like an impressionist painting, with a multitude of blue-green lines of rolling hills capped by mountain peaks and the thin greyish-yellow line of emerging dawn. The solitude imposed by the landscape is absolute and uninterrupted until the appearance of a truck in the extreme distance. The introduction on the soundtrack of Santaolalla’s solo guitar twangs, reminiscent of the soundtracks of old Westerns, is no interlude, but serves to accentuate the feeling of desolation in the scene. In sharp contrast, the final shot of landscape in the film is through Ennis’s trailer window, with a stretch of road, green fields and a strip of yellow fields beneath a pale blue sky. There is an almost indistinguishable dark line of what might be mountains in the distance. In fact, the landscape diminishes throughout the film and the mountains could be said to have disappeared by the end. This is a subtle metaphor: the mountain being symbolic of the relationship between the two men, and its disappearance from the time of Jack’s death a sign of the relationship’s end. As Stafford explains, “the two characters often appear in close-up, near to the camera with the landscape in the background; they also appear in long shot in compositions that emphasise the importance of the landscape” (2007: 99). The remaining image of the mountain: a postcard in Ennis’s closet pinned above the men’s intertwined shirts, is, therefore, an iconic and static reminder of the past.

The lack of dialogue in the opening and closing sequences allows for the addition of audio description at a comfortable pace:
AD: Dawn begins to break over hills and wild country. *Brokeback Mountain.*

(00:34–00:39)

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: He straightens the postcard of the mountains with the blue sky and wispy white clouds above them then shuts the door. / Through his trailer window, he can see fields, mountains and blue sky.

(2:02:33–2:02:47)

In these segments of description, the “wild country” and postcard views are included. But, where, in the second AD, the describer tells the audience that Ennis can see mountains from his trailer window, the contrast with the opening of the film in prelude to the romance is lost. The small trailer window affords a view of flat fields only in a restricted frame. Just as the preceding scene in which Ennis drives through green hills in the middle distance where no mountains are seen, although, again, this is not indicated in the AD. The second description also implies that Ennis is looking out of the window at the view, whereas, he is not. For him there is only the view of the postcard; just memories remaining. A greater contrast may, therefore, have been achieved through an emphasis of the vast landscape at the start and a more accurate account of what remains in view at the end of the film. It should also be noted that there is adequate time for audio description in the closing sequence, although the credit for the AD agency is brought in immediately with little time for the audience to reflect on the scene as the soundtrack swells with climactic intensity.

Traditional life

Immediately following the opening shots, there is a pause in the AD, which recommences with the start of guitar twangs on the soundtrack as a truck comes into view and just before the appearance of four telegraph poles. The poles are rich in symbolism, with three of them prominent like tall, dark crosses as the truck passes by. A cross is symbolic of Christianity or the Church (Danesi, 1999: 36), so the form of three tall crosses might be said to allude to crucifixion or sacrifice, and in the context of this film, to the violent, unforgiving attitudes of a strong Christian community. In this way, the truck (carrying
Ennis) appears to drive into hostile territory. The image of ‘crosses’ against the mountain backdrop is also referential of the opposition between ideology and nature, which is an important theme in this film. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: A large truck drives along a road, which is lit only by the truck’s headlights. As the sun rises, telegraph poles are silhouetted like crosses against the blue sky. There are lights above the truck’s cab.

(00:47–01:00)

The simile “like crosses” included in the AD could be described as interpretative by the advocates of objectivity in AD, but there is little doubt about the shape and prominence of the telegraph poles against the landscape. There is no mention of their number, which is appropriate, as describing four would fail to express an analogy and describing three would be inaccurate and explicit. The appearance of these dark shapes is not subtle, however, so the audio describer could have been forgiven for emphasising them further through the use of light or colour.

On arrival in town, the ominous sign on the foreman’s trailer, which Ennis approaches: “Trespassers will be shot. Survivors will be shot again”, reinforces the territorial motif and is indicative of a dated rural mentality. This is not audio described despite time to do so.

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

A more abstract link to the ‘dying’ or ‘decaying’ nature of the traditional West is the weather-worn, white-washed ranch house where Jack’s parents live. The interior of their home is completely white, other than for some furniture and a dark wooden cross on the
wall, although this is not audio described. In Jack’s bedroom, there is a picture of the Wild-West, a book featuring a cowboy on a horse and a toy wagon. But although the AD includes the toy cowboy and horse, none of the other details are described, nor at any point is it mentioned that Ennis has tears in his eyes or that he glances back up at Jack’s bedroom window as he walks away from the house (1:50:42 onwards). Rather, the description feels clinical, coming across as a listing of actions taking place.

Despite its more “specialised” character, *Brokeback Mountain* is not a difficult film to engage with (Stafford, 2007: 88). It could be described as a “Twilight Western”, a treatment of the demise of the West and of Western ideals; a narrative concerned with the threat of modern times, the consequences of not accepting change and the inherent “disappointment” of “characters who cannot somehow come to terms with the loss of the cowboy life” (Stafford, 2007: 91). As such, there are references to past clichés: light and dark cowboy hats, for example. In traditional Hollywood Westerns, the ‘goodies’ were often indicated by light clothing and the ‘baddies’ by black outfits, which became an obvious symbol for audiences of good fighting evil (Danesi, 1999: 125), although Metz believed this model to be eventually outmoded (1974: 70). In *Brokeback Mountain*, Ennis wears beige and a light-coloured cowboy hat, whereas Jack wears a blue shirt and black hat, drawing an obvious contrast between the characters, although a traditional interpretation of this is unsupported in the context, so this usage might be considered ironic. Stafford also observes the contrasts between the “timeless” symbols of the cowboy lifestyle and the physical changes in the characters’ facial hair, which he believes parallels “the social transformation in American culture that have occurred over 20 years” (2007: 92–93).

*Image removed due to Copyright restrictions*

Jack’s “black pickup truck”, “dark hair” and “dark Stetson” are audio described in the first few minutes of the film. But the colour of Ennis’s hat is not included despite mention of it twice. The account of Ennis as a “fair-haired man” is also slightly inaccurate, so does not make up for the omission. Taking into account the importance of the dark/light contrasts between these two characters, the additional description of Jack as having “three dark
marks on his jawline" (03:03–03:05) is also inappropriate. This AD gives the marks a vaguely sinister and misplaced relevance (like bruises or lesions), whereas they are nothing more than moles on the actor's face and so might be explicitly named or excluded from the AD.

**Character relationships**

Within seconds of the film's opening, Ennis is dropped off at a crossroads; a subtle metaphor for a juncture in his life. In the AD:

**AD:** In morning light, the truck stops just beyond a sign.  
(01:11–01:16)

Words such as 'crossroads' or 'junction' do not appear in the AD, so the metaphor is not expressed.

During the opening shots, Jack is shown looking at Ennis in a wing mirror, which is a clear narrative sign (Stafford, 2007: 101). The mirror is associated with thought (Cirlot, 2001: location 4940 of 9304) and, in this context, is a reflective device indicating Jack's contemplation of Ennis. Ennis is the only person framed in the mirror, and Jack regards him again after the start of their relationship, with Brokeback mountain now reflected in the background. This motif is stylistic and an important way of showing the link between Jack's thoughts of Ennis and the mountain. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

**AD:** The driver studies the other man for a moment then lowers his head. Later he shaves looking into a wing mirror [tapping heard] / In the mirror, he sees the reflection of the other guy now sitting on the steps leading up to the door.  
(03:18–03:31)
AD: Jack leans on the driver's door and Ennis leans uncomfortably on the bonnet. He turns and, swinging his bag of clothes over his shoulder, walks away. Jack climbs into the pickup [pickup engine heard] / Ennis pauses and as Jack drives past him then continues down the road. Jack watches Ennis in his wing mirror. (40:31–40:54)

The framing of Ennis in the mirror is included in each of these descriptions, which appropriately expresses the object of Jack’s thoughts. In the first AD, however, it is said that Jack “sees the reflection of the other man”, which sounds incidental, whereas he is deliberately studying him. Following the start of their romance on Brokeback Mountain, the landscape is not mentioned in the AD as Jack drives away from his lover.

Another strong narrative connection is made when Ennis loses a shirt, which he later finds inside one of Jack’s in Jack’s closet. This is a telling moment accompanied by soft orchestral music, which begins to build. The AD appropriately reminds the audience that these were the shirts from an earlier fight on the mountain. The shirts then appear at the end of the film hanging inside Ennis’s closet, this time with Jack’s shirt tucked inside Ennis’s. According to Stafford: “The importance of the shirts in narrative terms is that the first mention of the lost shirt in the early part of the film is a marker or a pre-echo of what will come later”; cognitive activity is, therefore, required for the audience to make the link (2007: 92). This marker also links to the careful manner in which Ennis folds his daughter’s jumper in the final scene and places it thoughtfully inside the same closet, despite the disarray of the rest of his trailer. For Stafford, this action indicates the character’s resolve not to lose his daughter also (2007: 93) and he believes the caress of the clothing to be a strong intertextual link to John Ford’s western The Searchers (1956). Ford’s films possess a distinctive “formal and thematic identity” (Mitry, 2000: 11). And in The Searchers a woman is seen furtively stroking her brother-in-law’s overcoat before he leaves to hunt cattle thieves. This bears a vague resemblance to the care Ennis takes with the sweater (and with Jack’s clothing), although might also be coincidental. The shirts motif appears in Annie Proulx’s original short story of Brokeback Mountain (1999) although they are not described as being in Ennis’s closet and there is no reference to his
daughter’s sweater in the book, so it is possible that the director added these details in homage to Ford. At the end of The Searchers, a door closes on the action like the closing of a book, which blacks out the scene as the main protagonist walks away, and this could also be directly compared to Ennis’s closing of the closet door at the end of Brokeback Mountain, although the entire frame is not blacked out by the door, so the intertextual link is, again, tentative. However, Stafford makes the important point that inferences will always be made by audiences whether a director intended a particular link or meaning or not. And, if intended, such references could communicate significantly more emotion to the audience in the final scene (2007: 93). In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Ennis shuffles through the trailer. He takes off his hat and hangs it on a hook. He notices Alma Junior’s sweater lying where she left it. He picks it up and goes to the door [door opens] / He leans out, looks down the road and shuts the door [door closes] / He tucks the neck of the sweater under his chin and folds it. He smells it as he finishes the last fold, then takes the sweater over to a cupboard. He opens it and lays the sweater on the top shelf. / His and Jack’s shirts are hanging inside the door beside a postcard of Brokeback Mountain. / He does up a button on Jack’s blue shirt, which is inside his. / Tears well in his eyes and his mouth twitches.

Ennis: Jack, I swear…

(2.01.30–2.02.30)

In this description the actions are listed, so each sign of Ennis’s affection is included: the folding and smelling of his daughter’s sweater, the placing of it in the cupboard, and the doing up of Jack’s shirt inside his. Perhaps the inclusion of the word ‘carefully’ and some indication of the otherwise-dishevelled nature of the trailer may have emphasised the attention taken by Ennis more. The use of the word ‘closet’ in place of “cupboard”, is also an Americanism that may have reflected the men’s secrecy surrounding their homosexuality in less liberal times. This would also have linked this AD to the scene in which Ennis first discovered the shirts at Jack’s parent’s home “hanging between the frame of the closet and the wall” (1:55:29–1:55:31). However, any link to The Searchers, whether intentional or not, is not incorporated in the AD, which appropriately leaves the audience to form their own interpretations.
**Film 4 – *Revolutionary Road* (Mendes, 2008)**

Dreamworks LLC / BBC Films / Evamere Entertainment / Neal Street Productions / Goldcrest Pictures / Scott Rudin Productions

Audio Description written and voiced by Alice Sanders of ITFC

This film is based on the novel by Richard Yates (1961) in which an arguing couple, April and Frank, seek fulfilment in their lives by making plans to relocate to Paris with their children. When Frank changes his mind in favour of a promotion and April becomes pregnant, she feels as though there is nothing left to live for. In this respect, the film’s themes revolve around conformity, the social norms of Fifties' America and the myth of family life.

**Relationship development**

In one of the first scenes of the film, the unhappy couple are filmed from a distance walking down a long corridor towards the camera. April walks behind Frank. This separation indicates some rift between them. Their body language, pace and conversation are also restricted by the corridor, which is in a public building, so although the argument smoulders, it does not erupt until they reach the privacy of their car. Corridors can be thought of as “retarders rather than accelerators of movement”, “dilatory, displacing, and distempering”, for “dallying, lingering, hovering, and, most of all, for waiting” (Connor, 2004: online). As such, the corridor draws out the couple’s exit from the building and builds towards the full force of a fight. It also frames the couple allowing the audience time to examine them as they move in from a distant perspective. In the audio description, the sense of the corridor as a place of limbo, a referent to the couple’s empty life and seemingly endless journey down an orderly and unchanging path, is only partially captured:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

**AD:** Frank and April march down a clean white corridor, both looking straight ahead / April is behind Frank. She carries a case and a cardigan in her other hand [steps heard].

(05:01–05:13)
Although April’s position behind Frank is noted in the AD together with the clinical ‘cleanness’ of the corridor, there is no sense of confinement, emptiness, tension or passage of time in this description. Rather, the AD delivers inconsequential details, such as the case and the cardigan, and in which hand April is carrying them.

The day after their fight, Frank is shown reflected in a polished wing mirror as he leaves for work. He is framed within the convex, circular surface, which miniaturises him like a figure in a bubble. As seen previously in the analysis of The Curious Case of Benjamin Button and Brokeback Mountain, mirrors are a reflection of reality and an instrument of contemplation; in this case, the sighted audience is given a chance to reflect on Frank’s world, an element of mise-en-scène that is not lost in the audio description:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Day. Reflected in the back of the wing mirror, Frank strolls across the lawn to the car. He wears a suit, a trilby and carries an attaché case. He opens the door of the car and surveys his large, clapboard house for a moment before getting in.

(09:30–09:42)

Here, the details of the car, suit, hat and case are now relevant: they indicate that Frank is leaving for work. He is the traditional breadwinner and head of the household. The moment of reflection on his home is also telling on the day after the argument. Frank may be thinking about his wife and what they have together.

Social conformity

Later, April is seen framed in close-up behind a glass door panel with horizontal blinds across her face and covering her mouth. A suburban house opposite is reflected in the window pane. As previously seen in The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas and The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, windows are portals on the outside world, but April appears ‘caged’ within this one, contemplating her environment from the confines of the home. As Berger states of history: “To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. [...] this has been at the cost of a woman’s self
being split into two" (1972: 46). Relative to this, and within the rectangular shape of the film frame in which the character is shot, the woman might also be considered trapped within the confinements of the cinema and, therefore, a representation of how women are portrayed in film. The horizontal lines, which serve to confine and 'split' the character of April are not included in the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: April pulls the door shut behind Helen. She stares out of the glass panel in the door. She wears a pensive expression on her beautiful face. She has a milky complexion and deep blue eyes.

(18:36–18:47)

The audio describer is concerned with how April looks physically, although the expression described does convey her contemplation through the glass. Any sense of entrapment is not expressed, however, so any deeper message is lost.

Near the end of the film, the camera lingers on the downstairs space, which is quiet and neat and composed like a still life, void of people and any signs of the family’s packing for France. The restoration of order to the home at this time is absent from the audio description:

[Images removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: A crisp morning light streams in through the windows of the house. The sitting room, dining room and living room are all empty of people.

(01:30:25–01:30:31)
The emptiness of the rooms is audio described. However, the rooms that were previously in disarray, filled with packing boxes and pictures taken down, are not described despite ample time to do so (there are six seconds for this AD plus a further twenty seconds of description before April speaks). Considering that these shots precede the final conversation between April and Frank before the housewife kills herself, the images are strongly significant, yet the deep sense of change is not conveyed to the target spectator.

The conformity in Fifties America is also emphasised in a sequence showing crowds of men, unspeaking and similarly dressed as they head in the same direction. A crowd represents: “Oneness” (Cirlot, 2001: 71), or sameness, which comes across in the choreographed flow of men from the station. The audio descriptions represent the harmony of this sequence, as follows:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD:  Wearing a white shirt and a long skirt, April stands in the living room with a tea towel in her hands / Frank waits at a train station with lots of other men in suits and trilbies too.  
(09:46–09:56)

AD:  A train chugs along the tracks, which are lined by trees / All the men in suits and hats sit in the train, some read papers.  
(10:01–10:08)

AD:  Swathes of commuters trapse up a ramp and into Grand Central Station with its high ceiling and huge arch windows / The commuters proceed down a set of steps.  
(10:11–10:20)

AD:  [Horn heard] Cars and cabs clog the streets of New York. Frank makes his way along a street and into a building surrounded by other men in suits / He stands in a crowded lift looking at the ceiling / A young woman with dark curly hair casts him a sideways glance. He looks back at her and she quickly averts her eyes. She smiles. [Lift Attendant: “Fifteenth floor”] / Most people make their way out of the lift. The young woman goes ahead of Frank who takes off his hat as he gets out / He ambles through a large office that’s partitioned into different sections.  
(10:26–11:01)
A detailed distinction in gender status is made in the first, straightforward description, where it includes the contrasting locations of the woman and the man (home/station), the number of people (alone/in a crowd), what April and Frank are doing (holding a tea towelgoing to work) and the differences in clothing (traditionally feminine/masculine) (although the hat is actually a fedora). There is confinement and order on the train and an unchanging pattern of suburban trees outside, which only partially comes across in the second AD, however. In the third AD, the term “swathes of commuters” accurately captures the sense of the crowd’s flow as the work day begins, although a feel for the synchronisation of movement in, through and out of the station is only partially captured by “traipse up”, “into” and “proceed down”. In the fourth AD in this sequence, the repetition of “men in suits”, the words “surrounded” and “clogs” and the “partitioned” sections in the office each contribute to the feeling of congestion and the ‘pigeon-holing’ of people in the business world. The look exchanged with the young woman in the lift, which is Frank’s only interaction during the commute, is also a narrative sign, a subtle introduction to the woman he will sleep with as marital life breaks down.

Film 5 – The King’s Speech (Hooper, 2011)

The Weinstein Company / UK Film Council / Momentum Pictures / Aegis Film Fund / Molinare Investment / FilmNation Entertainment / See-Saw Films / Bedlam Productions
Audio Description not credited

The King’s Speech is based on the true story of King George VI, (formally the Duke of York, affectionately known as ‘Bertie’, and alias ‘Mr Johnson’), who battled against a debilitating speech impediment. With the help of controversial speech therapist, Lionel Logue, Bertie went on to successfully address the Nation as King at the start of World War II. The obvious themes in this film, therefore, surround social status, fear of public speaking, friendship and hope in war time.

The radio microphone and public speech

Despite the upbeat orchestral music in the opening sequence, an impending speech at Wembley Stadium appears to cause Bertie considerable anxiety. The radio microphone, shot from different angles, dominates the screen and there is juxtaposition in cross-cut between shots of the microphone, the professional radio announcer making his preparations, close-ups of Bertie’s blurred and nervous face, his hand grasping the speech, and of Bertie’s framed image in one corner of the screen. In David Seidler’s
(2010) screenplay, the action begins: “Close on a BBC microphone of the 1920’s [sic], a formidable piece of machinery suspended on springs” (2010: 1). Bertie is described as nervous, terrified and frozen (2010: 2) and “without an ounce of confidence” (2010: 3) as he approaches the microphone “like a death march” (2010: 3). The day is suitably dreary in the film and the sound of a horse punctuates the silence as the crowd waits for Bertie to speak at the stadium. In the director’s commentary in the DVD extras (0:4:35–04:52), the director, Tom Hooper, explains:

I tried to shoot it with quite a strong sense of his subjective point of view as we come up the stairs towards the microphone and some wide lenses through the microphone so that, when we start the film, we’re inhabiting his point of view as strongly as we could.

In the audio description, there is no mention of the different views of the microphone that set and dominate the scene, nor a sense of Bertie’s diminished presence in a corner of the screen or at the bottom of the stairs to the stadium, nor of the Archbishop of Canterbury and other dignitaries blocking his way out as they are literally framed beneath the exit sign. According to Kress and van Leeuwen: “The stronger the framing of an element, the more it is presented as a separate unit of information” (2006: 203). However, the effects of framing in this scene, which subliminally inform the sighted audience of Bertie’s reduced psychological state in the face of the speech and his limited opportunities for escape, are not made available to the visually-impaired audience.

Bertie’s psychological suffering is also not fully achieved in the AD as he stands before the microphone, the image of which is blurred as it dominates the screen from Bertie’s subjective view point:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: The Duke glances nervously about. His wife smiles supportively. / All eyes look to the Duke. / He breathes erratically, fumbling his speech and flitting his eyes from the hundreds of faces turned to him expectantly. The red light next to the microphone flashes three times.

(03:20–03:39)
The effect of the subjective camera towards the end of the film is also underutilised in the AD:

AD: Bertie removes his naval uniform blazer and squares up to the microphone. (1:36:41–1:36:44)

AD: The red reflection of the flashing light illuminates the faces of both men. Logue starts to count down silently on his fingers then points at Bertie to start. As Bertie hesitates, Logue mouths the word “breathe” to him. Bertie swallows and bites his lips. (01:38:01–1:38:17)

The AD at the start of this scene appropriately shows Bertie ‘square up’ to the microphone as if confronting the ‘enemy’. Describing the reflection of the flashing red cue light on the faces of Bertie and Logue and indicating Bertie’s nervous mannerisms also evince a sense of the “palpable” tension (Seidler, 2010: 86) in the room. The framing of the men’s faces in the circular radio microphone is not described, however, so the connotation of the microphone’s continued dominance over Bertie is not proposed. Although the AD of technical effects would draw attention to how a film is constructed and detract from the narrative, it would have been possible here to include a straightforward description of the framing of the faces through the radio microphone as a literal feature of the diegesis. ‘Diegesis’ is the denotative content of film (Metz, 1974: xi) from which audiences can construe further meanings. But in this case, there is no opportunity to conceptualise further meaning from the imagery described in the AD.
Psychological barriers and social divide

The delicateness of the situation with Bertie’s stammer and the status of the Duke and Duchess of York, create an awkwardness when they first meet speech therapist Lionel Logue. When the Duchess meets Logue, he is framed in a doorway and neither party crosses the threshold. The Duchess also remains some distance from the door. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

Logue: Thank you very much for dropping by. Good afternoon.
AD: Logue disappears into his office.
Duchess: And what if my husband were the Duke of York?
Logue: The Duke of York?
Duchess: Yes, the Duke of York.
AD: Logue slowly reappears.

(10:10–10:24)

There is no indication of their separation in this AD, which is very much restricted by the dialogue, although Logue’s hesitation when he later shakes her hand is included. Again, when Logue meets Bertie he does not cross the threshold, but this motif of framing is not audio described:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Logue smooths his hair, checks his bowtie and opens the door.
Logue: Marvellous Willy. You can stay here and wait for your mum. [Pause] Mrs Johnson. Mr Johnson. Do come in.
AD: The Duke sighs heavily and makes towards Logue’s door / Logue nervously shakes hands and nods then steps back for the Duke to enter.

(18:12–18:31)
Although the description of a bowtie is incorrect, the fact that Logue is said to check his appearance and shake hands nervously give some sense of formality and Logue’s nervousness in meeting the Duke. The framing of Logue in the doorway is lost, but the symbolic moment when Bertie enters the treatment room is successfully captured in the AD. When Bertie, unspeaking, comes to sit down, he sits in a closed posture at the end of an old sofa before an expanse of wall in disrepair. For the director, the wall “somehow creates the feeling of a psychological space for Bertie and Logue to inhabit. It’s almost a surrealist space” (Director’s Commentary: 21:01–21:09). In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Bertie settles himself on the end of a rather dilapidated sofa.  
(19:04–19:07)

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Bertie looks disconcertingly at the furnishings and the flaking walls.  
(20:22–20:25)

In the time available, the audio describer chooses to balance between describing Bertie’s position on the sofa and the state of Logue’s room, although his position in one corner of the screen is not made prominent. Bertie is, though, described as “glum” in the AD of this scene and the “mottled, green-yellow-blue camouflage effect” of the wall is included (from 18:54), which goes some way towards linking his emotional and physical environments.

Later, when Bertie is upset, he is shown to walk some paces ahead of Logue down a long straight pathway through Regent’s Park. The dialogue in this scene is almost continuous,
allowing just two seconds for AD before the end of their conversation when AD can be more comfortably inserted:

[Images removed due to Copyright restrictions]

Bertie: You're nobody. These sessions are over.
AD: Bertie places a cigarette between his lips and storms off. Logue stands rooted to the spot, a look of wide-eyed disbelief on his face. [cigarette lighter heard] / After his first inhalation, Bertie adopts a more confident stride. A crestfallen Logue watches Bertie’s silhouette disappear into the early morning haze.

There is no further AD for nine seconds and the scene does not change for twelve seconds. This allows the audience time to listen to the melancholy piano notes of the film’s score as they absorb the heated argument. Despite ample time, it is also now too late to describe the characters’ brisk walk, one behind the other down a long, straight path during the moments of emotional tension. The act of Bertie’s inhaling from a cigarette, which seems to encourage his “more confident stride” is described, though, and is a straightforward and natural way of indicating his resolve.

The bi-plane motif

As a period drama, another of the film’s themes is post WWI / pre WWII Britain. Throughout the film there are many images of bi-planes, which are iconic of this period. Model bi-planes in Logue’s treatment room also give Bertie an opportunity to talk to Logue about his childhood and so are a symbolic reminder of the past. Each of these moments are either included in the dialogue or in the AD of the action:
Logue: My boys make those. They’re good, aren’t they?
AD: Bertie admires a model aeroplane. (18:59–19:01)

AD: On the Sandringham Estate, 1936. A freezing, grey, wintery afternoon. Bertie stands against his car parked between two fields. A bi-plane approaches from the distance / The plane makes its landing approach [plane heard] / Bertie smiles as the plane turns and makes its way back towards the car. The pilot is David, Bertie’s elder brother.
David: Hello Bertie.

AD: Logue still has a cushion in his jacket from playing the hunchbacked Caliban / The boys have left their books and aeroplane models. (45:33–45:40)
Bertie: Oh, it's a bi-plane.
Logue: I'll put on some...
Bertie: No, Logue. I'd kill for something stronger.
AD: Logue nods and heads for the drinks decanter.
Bertie: I wasn't there for my father's death. It still makes me sad.
Bertie: I can imagine so.

(46:05–46:23)

Despite the inclusion of the bi-plane motif throughout the film, there is no AD during the end credits when a poignant dedication to the director’s grandfather, a navigator killed in action in WWII, appears. This dedication is significant in explaining the bi-plane motif, yet there is no opportunity for the visually-impaired audience to connect with this message nor reflect on this era on a deeper, more personal level.

Film 6 – Black Swan (Aronofsky, 2010)

Fox Searchlight Pictures / Protozoa Pictures / Phoenix Pictures / Cross Creak Pictures
Audio Description written by Roland Bearne and voiced by Charlotte Swethearns of Deluxe

Black Swan is deliberately and extremely stylistic, a stage within the stage of Aronofsky’s cinematic vision. As such, this film is as much about the force of its own identity, as it is about the story of Nina, a prima ballerina. Within the film’s plot structure, as within Tchaikovsky’s ballet, Swan Lake, themes of identity, sexuality, good versus evil, and death can be found, as the boundaries between the life of the main protagonist and the white and black swan roles she dances become increasingly blurred.

Self-referentiality and colour imagery

There are numerous examples where the AD alludes to the film’s identity as a piece of constructed medium through the borrowing of technical language. For example:
**Black Swan. The title is white letters on black (01:07–01:12).**

**AD:** The scene fades to black. (03:14–03:16; 18:16–18:18)

**AD:** Cut to the dancer riding the subway. Her reflection looms darkly in the window. Lights flash by outside (04:56–05:03).

**AD:** The scene snaps to black (01:21:48–01:21:50).

**AD:** As she works, cross-fade to her in the [inaudible] and she's applying makeup (01:34:10–01:34:15).

Other than the term “cross-fade”, this language might be considered straightforward for AD users to understand, and although reminding audiences that they are watching a film by bringing attention to the camera and editing techniques, it plays an important part in showing the film’s stylistic nature. The “fades to black” also denotes a change of mood as Nina moves in and out of reality and her personality fragments during the dream-like and fabular states of the narrative.

The often tragic ending in interpretations of *Swan Lake* is also not lost in the film’s iconography. The extensive use of black and white, for example, is representative of the duality of the white/black swan personae. Colour is a common “semiotic resource” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 227) with definable meanings in cultural contexts (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 233). As Cirlot states: “Colour symbolism is one of the most universal of all types of symbolism” (2001: location 1873 of 9304), with the relationship between white and black being symbolic of opposing but interdependent forces of Yang and Yin (Bertrand, 1943 In Cirlot 2001: location 2629 of 9304). Applying this understanding to *Black Swan*, the film’s black and white contrasts become representative of opposing personalities and Nina’s struggle between good and the occult, as well as her oscillation between innocence and sexual maturity (a common “archetypal theme” (*Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*, 2006: 98) ) as she learns to dance the black swan role. A swan also symbolises the hermaphrodite (Cirlot, 2001: location 796 of 9304), although a white swan can be representative of Venus, chastity and purity (Cirlot, 2001: location 7128 of 9304). The immature and innocent Nina has no trouble in dancing the role of the white swan, but must embrace the role of the black swan also to successfully dance the lead in *Swan Lake*. The dual force of the imagery is, thus, essential to what the film intends to communicate.

In the composition of the first scene in the ballet studio, Nina is the only dancer not wearing black, but this is not audio described. In a later scene, where Nina disappoints Leroy, the Artistic Director, by failing in her attempt to dance the black swan, she is a pale, contrasting figure next to the darker character of Lily, but, again, this inverse mirroring is not alluded to in the AD:
AD: Nina picks up her things. Lily has an elaborate tattoo like wings on her upper back. Nina bumps into her as she walks out.

(14:28–14:34)

The simile used in the description of Lily’s tattoo, “like wings”, although interpretative and constituting a ‘semantic shift’ since it is more explicit than the tattoo on her back of two black lilies, is quicker for the audio describer to say and possibly more straightforward for the audience to comprehend symbolically (where wings represent birds, angels, demons, and so on), although the denotative quality of the dual flowers is not invalid nor the connotative effect of black lilies as a common symbol of death (as opposed to the chasteness that might be implied from a white lily). The character’s name is Lily, however, so it may have been more appropriate to describe a tattoo of two black lilies like wings on her back. The colour of the tattoo is also missing from the AD, so the implication of Lily’s darker nature is lost. The contrasting colour of the girls’ clothing is also omitted, although there is little time to add more detail here, but many other opportunities during the film to describe the dark and light clothing, set and props are also missed. In Leroy’s office, for example, which is a starkly black and white room, the continuous dialogue precludes AD, although there are approximately five seconds in which to describe before Nina enters the room. In Leroy’s apartment, the colour scheme is also extensively black and white, including a large black and white Rorschach print on the wall, but this is not audio described:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: At Leroy’s opulent flat, there’s a desk, exercise equipment and a grand piano.

(34:39–34:42)
The black lamp and white lamp behind Leroy and Nina respectively as Leroy asks about her sexuality are also excluded from the AD in this scene. As Artistic Director, it is in Leroy’s interests to transform Nina into a ‘black swan’ by awakening her sexual desire. His hard and manipulative character is such that he epitomises Swan Lake’s antagonist, Rothbart, an evil sorcerer who casts a spell to turn the innocent Odette into a swan. At the same time, where Leroy is seen, to Nina’s horror, to seduce her rival, Lily, he encapsulates the man Odette loves, Prince Siegfried. In this way, there is an Oedipal sense of sexual rivalry, where Nina and Lily vie for the attention of the patriarchal figure of Leroy.

*Mirroring and cloning*

The dual nature of Leroy’s character, emphasised in the black and white cinematography of his environments, is also demonstrated in a distinctive double-headed mirror image of him in the ballet studio, which does not come across in the AD:

| Leroy: But which of you can embody both swans: the white and the black? |
| AD: Nina stares at him, her breath’s coming in short bursts. He looks around with detached amusement. |
| (10:02–10:16) |

With no mention of mirroring in this AD, any inference that might be derived from the visual signifier is lost.

From the beginning of the film, Nina’s conflicting nature is also evident in mirror imagery. For example, when she is first introduced to the audience after waking from a dream, she is shown stretching in front of a triple, full-length mirror. There is no mention of the mirror nor the dark flash of Nina’s mother passing behind her in the AD:
In the living room, she stretches out hands and one foot on the floor, the other straight up in the air. She sits and manipulates her ankle. (03:39–03:45)

The split mirror images of Nina in the kitchen scene that follows is also not audio described, nor the way in which the character is framed in multiple mirrors perched bird-like on a stool, nor the black attire of her domineering mother:

And you’re the most dedicated dancer in the company. (04:30–04:33)

As the dancer makes her way to the theatre, she contemplates her reflection in a subway window, which is picked up in the audio description:

Cut to the dancer riding the subway. Her reflection looms darkly in the window. Lights flash by outside. (04:56–05:03)

In the AD, Nina is said to look at her image “darkly”, which successfully conveys a sense of unease, as accompanied by ominous music, together with the negative connotation in the word “looms”. The contrast of the reflection against the white feather-like scarf and
pink coat of the innocent Nina are, however, missed, although the AD does go on to describe Nina’s gestures, which are reflected in those of a look-alike on the train, which appropriately conveys the idea that ‘another Nina’ exists:

AD: The girl looks down the carriage and spots a young woman almost identical to herself, also with her hair tied back in a severe bun. The other girl adjusts a stray lock of hair and the dancer does the same. The other girl gets off at the next station. The dancer watches the other girl as she leaves.  

(05:08–05:32)

However, when Nina leaves the subway and stops to study two identical posters of the current prima ballerina, the dual imagery is excluded from the AD, which describes only one poster. The connotational effect of the repeated poster is also ambiguous in the AD when the poster bears Nina’s own image near the end of the film:

AD: She rushes out of the theatre and pauses at the Swan Lake posters bearing her image.  

(01:17:38–01:17:45)

The extroverted Lily embodies the characteristics of the black swan, which childlike Nina struggles to imitate, making her a subject of fascination for Nina. Upon their first meeting, Nina is shown studying Lily in a mirror, their heads framed together in close-up, which is omitted from the AD (06:44–06:57). It is also missed that this is the same girl that Nina spotted earlier on the subway who made identical movements to herself.

As Nina metamorphoses into a ‘black swan’ under the influences of Leroy and Lily, her identity begins to split. The circular and fractured image of Nina in the hallway mirror of her home, now wearing black clothing after a night out with Lily, shows this almost explicitly, yet is not audio described. Nor is the framing in the divided mirror of Nina’s face and part of her body and part of Lily’s body as if they were a single person. In fact, the AD describes the characters separately and without depth:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]
AD: They’re both doubled over with the giggles as they arrive back at Nina’s place. Lily taps Nina on the shoulder as Erica appears. 

(01:04:21–01:04:27)

The breaking of a mirror near the end of the film becomes symbolic of the end of Nina’s inner struggle as she finally embraces the black swan character to become Swan Queen. In the AD:

AD: Lily had morphed into Nina as the black swan. Nina smashes her nemesis into a mirror. As she looks down at the inert form, her black swan self tries to throttle Nina. 

(01:29:30–01:29:39)

The use of the words “morphed” and “black swan self” in this AD successfully capture Nina’s metamorphosis, although it is confusing who is doing what in this scene since “she” and “the inert form” are unclear identifiers.

Dancing itself plays a part in the “rites of passage” of young people in many cultures (Danesi, 1999: 62). And as Nina’s metamorphosis completes, the shadows of two swans appear behind her as she dances on stage. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: The lights make her reflection two mighty black swans on the back wall / Nina turns to face a standing ovation / Her bare arms accepting the applause with elegant grace / She looks out with icy confidence at the crowd. 

(01:32:43–01:33:00)

Nina’s double nature is emphasised by the two swan reflections described, although she is now able to embrace both the black swan and the white swan, so the AD of two black swans might be considered misleading. However, the “icy confidence”, together with the dancer’s body language, comprise a successful interpretation of the character’s final transformation.
During Nina’s struggle with her sexuality earlier in the film, a scene takes place below an eight foot bronze sculpture, *Future Clone* (by Fritz Scholder, 1999). This sculpture might be described as an “androgynous angel” (Art Daily: online), “chilling like a Baselitz painting, all devoured face and wings, an evil spectre” (Wilshin, 2011: online), so is an ominous presence as Beth, the outgoing Swan Queen (or Dying Swan), verbally abuses Nina. Jean Baudrillard (2001: 38) offers a further description of the (future) clone as follows:

…the clone may be seen as the parody of the original, its ironic, grotesque version. In that case, we may imagine all kinds of situations which might overturn our ‘Oedipal’ psychology. Such as the future clone killing his father, not in order to sleep with his mother—something which is impossible now, since there is only one parent-cell, and the father may very well be a woman—but to recover his status as an original. Or, conversely, the original, disqualified by his double, avenging himself on his clone. We may even envisage an entirely new function of clones (one that runs counter to all the functions assigned to them today, which generally have to do with perpetuating life): they may be used to satisfy the death drive, the instinct of self destruction.

Many parallels can be drawn between these concepts of an androgynous clone and the human/winged, angelic/demonic, white/dark sculpture in this scene, which is a motif representing the dichotomies in Nina’s personality and relationships. The deeply complex idea of an anti-Oedipal psychology is also vaguely alluded to in the scenes where Nina is seen only to have a mother, where she makes love to herself, where she morphs into the darker character of Lily (with whom she imagines having a homosexual relationship), and where she fatally stabs herself believing that she is killing the black swan/Lily in an vengeful attempt to win status. She ends by destroying herself, drawing a parallel with Odette’s suicide in the ballet, as well as with Tchaikovsky himself, who conceived the ballet, was homosexual and was rumoured to have committed suicide (*Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*, 2006: 1880). The AD reads:

*AD:* Nina’s left alone in the echoing cavernous marble hall / She studies a statue of a man with wings instead of arms and moves in for a closer look / The statue has a ghostly, mournful presence, with dark smudges where the features
should be. She takes it in. She whirls round in fright to find Beth standing right behind her.

(33:01–33:37)

Although the audio describer refers to the creature’s wings, its “mournful presence” and dark featureless face, he describes the sculpture as “a man”, which seems inappropriate since it fails to convey the idea of a genderless and sexless clone (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2006: 421). The use of mirrors throughout the film, as already discussed, is another device that ‘clones’ the characters and reflects Nina’s fractured psychology; reference to which is lacking in the AD. The mirror smashes, the swan dies, and the feature ends (metaphors in themselves) in an ultimate annihilation of both Self and Film. This film is, therefore, built on a variety of subtextual propositions including notions of Oedipal concern and of mass media ‘cloning’ in respect of both subject matter and actors. In this respect, the concept of cloning might also be interpreted on a more abstract level, where Natalie Portman, the actor who plays Nina, has also played multiple other characters, including the lead in Star Wars: Episode II–Attack of the Clones (Lucas, 2002). According to Lindstrom, “Aronofsky doesn’t seem to mind if the viewer muddles the line between the character and the actor to engage with the work in a larger context” (2010: online), so, if intended, the significance of the clone is transformed in this film to a pun on another level for fans.

Film 7 – Casino Royale (Campbell, 2006)

Columbia Pictures / Eon Productions / Casino Royale Productions / Stillking Films / Babelsberg Film / Government of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas
Audio Description by Veronika Hyks of IMS

This film is a loose adaptation of Ian Fleming’s 1953 novel of the same title, in which the British secret agent, James Bond, achieves ‘Double-0’ status. Set in modern day, Bond seeks to bankrupt the paymaster of terrorist organisations by engaging in a high-stake poker game. He falls in love with Treasury Agent, Vesper Lynd, who is sent to oversee his £10 million stake. The film’s themes concern love and treachery, with references to the Cold War espionage of the original story.
Noir imagery and dark characterisation

For Eco, *Casino Royale* is a metaphor: “Bond always gambles and wins, against the Villain or some vicarious figure” (1979: 157). Both the narrative and the character of Bond are darker than in previous ‘Bond’ films, however, which, according to Lehman and Luhr was intentional (2008: 139), with Bond bearing a truer resemblance to the “ironical, brutal and cold” killer described in Fleming’s original text (Fleming, 1953: location 141 of 2336), as also explained by the director in the DVD extra *Becoming Bond* (Special Treats Production, 2006: 13:12–13:22): “The book is very real [...] it’s a much grittier kind of realistic portrait of Bond”. This reality might, therefore, be expected to come across in the AD.

The film begins in black and white with low-angle, disorientated shots of a man wearing a Russian style hat descending a car in front of a large, institutional-style concrete building, which stylises the film like post-war espionage movies of the Cold War period (at its height between 1948 and 1953 (*Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*, 2006: 430) during which time the novel was written). In this context, the ‘film noir’ strongly relates to the past. The shapka hat provides another clue, by association, to the man’s identification with Russia and, therefore, with Communism. He enters the building by way of a glass and metal lift, accessing his office along a soulless passageway, soon discovering his safe open and Bond seated behind him in the dark. Subsequent dialogue confirms the visual clues in the cinematography, that the man, Dryden, is British and a double-agent acting for the Russians. In the AD:

[Images removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: In grainy black and white, a car pulls up outside an office building at night. A caption reads ‘Prague, Czech Republic’. / A middle aged man in a fur hat and overcoat gets out. / He rides up in a glass-walled lift, his eyes fixed on the electronic floor indicator. / He strides along a raised walkway [footsteps on metal heard] / and comes into his office [door closed]. He removes his hat and switches on a light. His dark eyes freeze. The wall safe is open.

(00:30–01:11)
The clues in the AD help convey the mood of the sequence: the “grainy black and white”, the location from the inter-title and the man’s fur hat, each of which, in context, are strong signifiers of espionage. It would be difficult to include the initial, angular camera shots in the AD, although the architecture of the building is starkly Communist, which may have linked with the Cold War theme had the concrete, institutional style building been described. When Dryden subsequently sits at his desk, it is in a large, high-backed desk chair in skeletal form; one of three similar chairs around the desk. This detail is not audio described, and although the shape of the chairs may be inconsequential, the skeletal form is a motif that will reoccur in the film. In the sequence filmed at a von Hagens *Body Worlds* exhibition in Miami, for example, (the title of which is audio described), during which Bond stabs a man to death and drops him into a chair in the exhibition, three skeletal figures are posed around a casino table in a metaphorical deathly game. The lifeless plastinates play cards while another rides a dead horse nearby. According to Cirlot, skeletons personify Death (2001: location 6676 of 9303). Thus, these gruesome images personify the film’s darker nature and link syntagmatically to other killings (Dryden’s assassination, a murdered horsewoman with whom Bond has a brief liaison, and at the lethal card game to come). The fact also that Dr von Hagens, who makes a cameo appearance in the crowded exhibition space, was a political prisoner in Communist East Germany (Bodyworlds: online) before defecting to the West is interesting trivia, which provides another link to the Cold War period of Fleming’s novel. In the AD:

*Image removed due to Copyright restrictions*

AD: The exhibition space is crowded with visitors milling among the plastinated human exhibits. At one table a skeleton and two skinless people play poker. Another exhibit appears to be reading. (39:12–39:22)

The AD conveys something of the nature of the exhibition, including the skeletal figures and card game, although does not include the large plastinated horse and rider on display, with a possible loss of motif. Dr von Hagen’s appearance is also difficult to spot despite a camera crew following the man with signature black fedora, but having already named the exhibition in the AD, this detail can be considered inconsequential to the scene.
In Dryden’s office, there is a visual introduction to Bond sitting in the shadows in a heavy, dark coat. He is an unsmiling, serious figure in a cold, Eastern European environment. This is the first sign of a less classic Bond. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

**AD:** James Bond wearing black sits in a chair half in shadow.  

(01:18–00:46)

Although the use of the word “black” in a black and white sequence may be meaningless, the dark clothing and positioning of Bond “half in shadow” add intrigue to the first impression of this character. Bond is further described in a fight scene juxtaposed in flashback montage:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

**AD:** The man falls limply to the floor. / Bond takes deep breaths but his hard face shows no emotion as he looks down at his victim.  

(02:59–03:05)

The “hard face” of the unsmiling Bond in this AD simply conveys the tone of his character. The AD also allows pauses during the fight for the harsh, dramatic soundtrack to be absorbed by the audience. As the action cuts back to Dryden’s office, there is no time to describe the flash of a family photograph, which visually conveys Dryden’s last thoughts, as Bond mercilessly shoots him dead.

During further action, Bond is appropriately described as hard, with a cold stare, and “chiselled face” (21:45). For Fleming’s Bond: “The villains and heroes get all mixed up” (Fleming, 1953: location 1732 of 2336) and this is somewhat reflected in this film. For example, near the start, Mr White in a pale suit (audio described) initiates a business
transaction with mercenaries. Bond is also frequently seen in black clothing, other than during some scenes in hot climes. Arriving in the Bahamas, for instance, in a pale grey suit, he is taciturn and frowning in dark glasses; a sign of a pitiless nature. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD:  Wearing a tailored, pale suit with crisp white shirt and dark shades, Bond observes Le Chiffre’s yacht moving into the harbour.

(24:47–24:53)

The “pale suit” and “dark shades” in the AD help build the character’s persona. In the time allowed, the audio describer has not chosen to indicate the poker-faced expression, but has, more importantly, prioritised the object of Bond’s gaze towards Le Chiffre’s yacht, which helps explain his presence in the Bahamas.

He later glances at two women without returning their smiles, indicating a harder, less flirtatious personality in contrast to the suave stereotype of his predecessors in the ‘Bond’ franchise. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD:  He hands his keys to the valet, who drives the car away. Two attractive women in short tennis dresses stroll by.


AD:  Bond glances at them then bends down and pretends to tie his shoe lace as he checks out the position of the Club’s CCTV cameras.

(25:29–25:43)

This description shows a Bond preoccupied with the task at hand rather than with the women. His glance is cold and unsmiling, however, which might have added depth to the AD.
**Intertextuality and objectification**

Bond’s only encounter before falling for Vesper is with Solange, a dark haired, Mediterranean beauty he wishes to question. As the ‘Bond girl’ appears on a white horse along a beach, the soft orchestral soundtrack signals a romantic encounter as Bond emerges from the sea. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

**AD:** Three young Bahamian children run after a stunning woman with long, flowing dark hair in a bikini and short sarong riding a white horse along the shore.

(29:03–29:11)

This AD appropriately conveys the iconic nature of the ‘Bond girl’, containing the salient points of Solange’s entrance: her beauty, the “long, flowing dark hair”, insubstantial clothing and the “white horse”, which stereotypically represents a good or heroic character, in its paradigmatic opposition to black.

As Bond swaggers from the sea noticing Solange, his attire is reminiscent of Sean Connery’s swimming trunks in *From Russia With Love* (Young, 1963) and his blue swim shorts with black belt in *Thunderball* (Young, 1965). At the same time, however, the appearance of Bond from the sea seems to parody Ursula Andress’s emerging from the water as Honey Ryder in *Dr No* (Young, 1962), as mimicked by Halle Berry’s Jinx in *Die Another Day* (1962). As such, this image is an iconic intertextual reference, whilst being important in parodying the female cliché of previous ‘Bond’ films. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]
Bond in blue Speedos with a black waistband emerges from the water, his toned muscular torso glistens in the sun as he looks around the beach. He watches the dark haired beauty dismount.

(29:17–29:28)

As part of the action, this segment of AD appropriately conveys the objectification of Bond’s strong, glistening physique as he walks out of the sea, which, together with a description of the trunks, creates an intertextual proposition for the audience whilst successfully parodying the ‘Bond girl’ entrance.

Bond’s adversaries and ocular references

In contrast to the stern, yet attractive Bond, his enemies have physical abnormalities. In Madagascar, for example, Bond’s target, Mollaka, is disfigured by burn scars. These are not audio described, however, since the scars are mentioned in the dialogue. In early symbology, abnormalities represent supernatural forces (Cirlot, 2001: location 916 of 9303). Thus, evil figures in mainstream films are often signalled by unusual or sinister characteristics. It is not surprising, therefore, that the impeccably-dressed, dark-suited Le Chiffre in Casino Royale personifies a morally subhuman adversary with his bleeding eye and “flagellant” inclinations (Fleming, 1953: location 224 of 2336). The bleeding eye is not in the original story, although the whites of his eyes are said to abnormally encircle the irises of the character (1953: location 933 of 2336), which Fleming described as like “murky basalt” (1953: location 997 of 2336). In the novel, Le Chiffre also grows ‘a third eye’ when shot through the head (1953: location 1574 of 2336). In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

Mr White walks in with a gun pointed at him.

(1:48:48–1:48:50)

Le Chiffre’s lifeless body slams onto the floor. The screen is plunged into darkness.

(1:49:07–1:49:11)
Although Le Chiffre is not shot directly between the eyes in the film, neither the shot in the forehead nor the gaping hole are audio described. Other than a loss in ocular motif, this constitutes a loss in continuity between the result of this scene and the subsequent image of Bond in extreme close-up opening his eyes in a hospital, which is included in the AD.

Other audio descriptions concerning Le Chiffre include the following:

AD: A man in black with smooth black hair and a pronounced side parting gets out. (07:43–07:47)

AD: He looks at Le Chiffre and notices blood weeping from the corner of his discoloured left eye. Le Chiffre takes out a handkerchief and dabs at the blood.

Le Chiffre: Weeping blood comes merely from the derangement of the tear duct, my dear General. Nothing sinister.

AD: The General raises his eyebrows and looks at his cards. (19:09–19:32)

The first of these descriptions paints a straightforward yet strong picture of Le Chiffre, which appropriately accompanies the sinister music in the soundtrack, with the arresting blackness of his clothing and “pronounced side parting” of his black hair. Le Chiffre is additionally audio described as “black-suited”, using an inhaler, and with a “tight-lipped, poker face” (from 07:52), which develops his persona appropriately. The second extract above demonstrates a necessity to complete the dialogue, where a description of his weeping eye is essential, although the addition of “discoloured left eye” adds motif, since this irregularity is later mirrored in the film. For example, during the scene in which Le Chiffre’s girlfriend, Valenka, poisons Bond’s cocktail (which he names ‘Vesper’ after Vesper Lynd, becoming itself a symbol of poisoned love when she later betrays him), the left eye of the blonde villainess is covered by a heavy fringe. Although described earlier as an “attractive, slim blonde” (19:07) and a “cool blonde” (1:14:12), she is not classically good looking and now looks strange and doll-like as she turns pouting in Bond’s direction. In the AD:
AD: Valenka turns to watch.  
(1:29:53–1:29:54)  

Despite time, an indication of Valenka’s covered left eye and sinister expression are missing from the AD with a loss of effect and motif preceding Bond’s sudden illness at the poker table. Such distortions or damage in the left eye affirm some dark symbolism in this film, and although the precise meaning of this is ambiguous, its absence from the AD negates any opportunity for the target audience to make a connection. Gettler also, an associate of the mysterious Mr White, has a black lens in his glasses over his left eye, which is, this time, incorporated in the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]  

AD: Vesper, smiling, takes a photograph. A man in a hat wearing an eye patch wanders through a canal-side market with a newspaper folded under his arm, his hands thrust in his trouser pocket. Vesper’s smile fades. The man looks pointedly in her direction.  
(1:58:09–1:58:23)  

Where the man’s monocled eye is included in the AD, and where he “looks pointedly” at Vesper, this direct and purposeful look, which causes her concern, successfully yet subtly conveys a connection between them. When Gettler is later seen receiving money from Vesper, the eye patch of the mysterious man is not immediately audio described, however, so there is no connection with the man who looked at Vesper until the end of a dramatic fight scene in which Bond is described as firing a nail through his eye patch (from 2:07:28). This oversight creates some loss in linkage and a delay in the audience’s assimilation of events, although they are by now aware of Vesper’s deceit.
The title animation and narrative clues

Reference to the eye and to tears of blood is also made in the film’s title sequence. The sequence begins immediately after Bond’s encounter with Dryden in Prague and when it is visually confirmed that he has made two professional kills; noted in the dialogue as a requirement for promotion to ‘Double-0’ status. Bond fires directly at the camera down an animation of what could be the interior of a gun barrel, which causes blood to run down the screen at the position where the gunman would be standing. The circular aperture could also be self-reflexively associated with a camera lens or with the iris of a left eye, which bleeds like tears as a result of Bond’s bullet. During the rest of the opening sequence, Bond fights with illustrated figures among playing card graphics that spiral around him like webs and which form tentacles that split like veins spilling red hearts. Vesper’s face is seen on the Queen of Hearts as the sights of a weapon pass across the playing card, and animated roulette tables become gun sights that find their target. The dominant blood red, heart-shaped bullets and blood of the sequence are significant. The heart signifies Love (Cirlot, 2001: location 868 of 9303) and, thus, the imagery bears a fleeting clue that Bond will fall in love with this woman, although will in some way be connected with spilt blood: a symbol synonymous with sacrifice (Cirlot, 2001: location 1450 of 9303). Moreover, Vesper’s dress, lipstick and shoulder bag on the day she betrays Bond are red: the colour of love and passion, but also of violence and blood, as reminiscent of the title sequence (the colour of the dress being audio described (from 1:58:53) ). There is ambiguity, however, concerning Vesper’s status, as honest or double-agent before she is revealed to have sacrificed herself to save her French-Algerian boyfriend, and now Bond. The mystery surrounding this character is encapsulated in the Algerian love knot necklace she wears through most of the film, which is referred to both in the dialogue and in the AD, which reinforces the clue with subtle reminders that she is wearing this silver pendant.

Near the end of the title sequence, Bond’s status is confirmed on a seven-of-hearts shot twice at point-blank range to form two round ‘0s’, like open eyes, before the number seven. The seven-of-hearts is on the table the first time Bond bets and wins, although this shot is fleeting and not included in the AD. In the title description:
AD: Bond fires through the aperture of a camera lens. Blood seeps down across the lens.

(03:35–03:41)

AD: An animated sequence shows deadly playing cards and Bond shooting to kill [theme song begins].

(03:47–03:50)

AD: Type print reads “James Bond 007 status confirmed. Based on a [sic] novel by Ian Fleming”. [Further titles read by the describer] The computer generated figure of Bond strides forward into the light and becomes sandy-haired, blue-eyed James Bond 007.

(06:12–06:39)

Following one sentence of AD at the start of the opening sequence, Chris Cornell’s ‘Bond’ theme, You Know My Name, is allowed to play uninterrupted for almost two and a half minutes before the audio describer confirms Bond’s status and successfully merges the animation with a colour image of the “sandy-haired, blue-eyed” Bond. The initial extract above confirms for the target audience that the sequence is animated, which is a traditional opening to this genre, and that the action involves playing cards, which links with the film’s title and are skilfully described in the short timeframe as “deadly”. The absence of AD during the majority of the animated sequence does constitute a loss of narrative clues, genre signifiers and an appreciation of the creative graphics. However,
these translational losses in favour of the theme song are understandable to a certain extent, since 'Bond' theme songs are iconic in their own right, becoming internationally recognised, popular tunes, characteristic of the bold and dramatic style of the films in the franchise. So, when a new 'Bond' film is released, it is probable that the audience will be keen to listen to it.

**Vehicles and equipment**

In a similar vein, the vehicles Bond drives will be of significant interest to fans. The silver Ford, Range Rover, silver Aston Martin won in a card game, new Aston Martin DBS delivered with gadgets, and Spirit 54 yacht are all audio described in *Casino Royale*, whereas the product placement of Sony equipment (laptop, phone and camera, for example), indexical perhaps of the film’s financial backing, is not. Where the automobile might be described as "an extension of sexual persona" since an owner’s gender and personality are reflected in the type of car they drive (Danesi, 1999: 60), the inclusion of the cars driven by Bond in the AD is understandable, whereas the value of other brand name products would need to be verified.

**Film 8 – Last Chance Harvey (Hopkins, 2008)**

Overture Films / Process Productions  
Audio Description by Veronika Hyks of IMS

A divorced man, Harvey, in his sixties who is down on his luck meets a single, forty-something woman, Kate, when he travels to England for his daughter’s wedding. They strike up a friendship and resolve personal issues while spending time together in London. The film tackles themes of loneliness, love, family conflict and the overarching idea of ‘last chances’.

**A man alone**

In the opening sequence, an older man sits at a piano in semi-darkness. The camera focusses on the veined hands at work before moving to a close-up of his lined face, his eyes concentrated on the keys. There is a reflection of his hands in the piano lid, and of his face in the polished surface, together with a ribbon of reflected light resembling a strip of camera film or a set of white piano keys cutting across the black surface. Where the
musician’s image is reflected in the dim light, there is a subtle sense of sadness in this composition. Opening with the ‘germinal’ imagery of the man’s hands in semi-darkness could also be considered a metaphor for the beginning of the story, although in this case, is ironic, since the man is beyond middle age. Although simple, the components of this sequence offer diverse meanings, visually presenting the character of Harvey in depth. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: From side on, a man in his mid-sixties, wearing a black shirt sits at a piano in a dark room, his hands moving lightly across the keys are reflected in the polished raised piano lid.

(00:42–00:53)

The AD notes the man’s age, the dark attire and location, and the reflection of his hands in the piano, which successfully offers a sense of mood to the audience who can hear gentle piano music being played. This AD also portrays a man in the shadows who will soon be revealed to be a composer, side-lined in favour of younger talent, and a divorcée who is an embarrassment to his daughter. There is little time to include the ribbon of reflected light in the audio description, although with an adjustment of less-essential vocabulary (“From side on”, “mid”, “lightly”, “raised”), the reflection of the man’s face could have been easily added. Without this detail, there is less opportunity for the audience to begin to conceptualise his psychological identity, which is a crucial part of the narrative.

Linkage to further symmetrical imagery and reflections of his face is also lost. For example, when the man, Harvey, arrives at his hotel room in London, the room is along one of two empty and symmetrical corridors that create a deep v-shaped perspective. This labyrinthine imagery parallels the mirror symbolism most notably used in The Shining (Kubrick, 1980) (Ager, 2008: online), and invokes a complex and confused state of mind. In the context of this stage of the film, Harvey is displaced and alone in both professional and personal turmoil. In the AD:
On an upstairs floor, Harvey lets himself into his room.

(10:22–10:25)

This audio description excludes the visual mirroring of the corridors, so any allusion to Harvey’s wandering in dislocation is lost. In his room, Harvey cannot open the window, which also limits his contact with the outside world. The blind unfurls leaving him in semi-darkness just as his daughter calls to tell him that the wedding party has rented a house elsewhere without him. In the AD:

He peers through the window at the rainy street below. / He tries to open it. / He pulls a sunscreen down a few inches. It falls down all the way.

Harvey: Oh, boy.

(10:28–10:47)

As part of the action, the AD appropriately captures the dullness of the “rainy” day and his failure to open the window, although the sombre light is not described. His “soulless room” (13:14) is audio described later, however, which reflects his lack of spirit, together with the lack of colour in the room and in his life.

As Harvey dresses for the pre-wedding dinner, he regards himself for some time in the mirrored wardrobe. There is no satisfaction in his demeanour and he is positioned 180 degrees from his reflection, which expresses some refusal to accept what he sees. In the AD:
AD: He pulls back the jacket and, slipping his hands in his trouser pockets, takes a look at his side view in the mirrored wardrobe door. (13:40–13:46)

Although the mirror motif and the side view are included in this description, there is no sense of disappointment in his pose.

In a later scene in which Harvey takes a difficult call from work, his reflection in a mirror is both diminished and vertically cut in half. He is visually marginalised as his professional position is side-lined, and his image becomes increasingly fragmented on a subsequent call at the same location. There is no time to include audio description at this mirrored location, however, due to the continuous telephone conversations. On his return to the dinner table, Harvey has been marginalised to an end seat, whilst in cross-cut Kate returns from a pub toilet to find that she has also been ousted from her seat during a date.

From the beginning of the film, the cross-cut montage shows Harvey and Kate in similarly awkward and unrewarding situations. This establishes a link between the two lonely characters, mirroring an emptiness and lack of direction in their lives. In the AD:
AD: Kate comes back to the table to find the bubbly brunette and the other couple sitting with Simon.

(21:10–21:16)

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Harvey comes back to the dinner table to find his jacket draped over a different chair.

(22:02–22:07)

A natural and straightforward link is formed between these ADs through the use of similar wording: “comes back to [...] find”. However, neither of these descriptions shows Kate and Harvey to be physically relegated to the end of their tables in a mirroring of their situations.

The mirror motif is repeated in a scene following Harvey’s daughter’s decision to ask her stepfather to give her away. As doleful piano notes are heard on the soundtrack, Harvey’s profile is symmetrically reflected in a bathroom mirror. His eyes are averted and he leans back against the beige tiles, which blend with his beige suit, at a right angle to the mirror. Again, this image expresses the man’s dejection and his refusal to accept who he is. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: She walks away leaving him rooted to the spot, his thin lips pressed together, his tired eyes blinking numbly. He stands leaning on the wall of the men’s room, his side view reflected in the mirror.

(28:21–28:34)

This segment of AD is straightforward, adequately including key elements of the imagery: Harvey’s position against the wall, the side view and his reflection in the mirror, although the fact that he is turned away from his own reflection is not made clear. His despondent
expression is also only partially captured in the AD, although the scene is accompanied by melancholy piano notes on the soundtrack, which adequately emphasise his dejection.

With the cohesion of the recurring soundtrack, the action cuts to a close-up of Kate looking melancholy and excluded during her blind date. She sits tearfully in a toilet cubicle as the action cuts back to Harvey, similarly confined in a taxi, his sad face averted from his reflection in the window. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: In a bus on his way back to the hotel, Harvey leans against the bus window as the London street glides past.

(29:21–29:27)

The description includes a factual error of Harvey on a bus rather than in the taxi he will later get out of, which diminishes his sense of isolation. There is also no indication of his downcast expression or of his reflection in the window as the lights of the city pass by, with a loss in the sense of the character’s physical and psychological confinement.

The sequence ends with Harvey leaving the taxi and closing the door as Kate enters the cab from the other side; another example of symmetry and association between them. But with the closed door and his back towards her, Harvey loses another chance to connect with Kate (having brushed her off earlier at the airport). The open door might be said to act as a gateway symbolising change, whereas closed, this taxi door represents the antithesis: a barrier to the their relationship developing. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Kate throws her jacket over her shoulders as she leaves the pub. A cab coming down the street slows down. Harvey hands the driver the fare and gets
out in the middle of the street. Kate jumps in through the other door. The cab pulls away.

(29:29–29:42)

As part of the action, the AD adequately follows the characters through their lost opportunity. However, Harvey’s closing of the door is not included in the AD, nor is his sense of directionlessness as he stands hesitating in the street.

When Harvey misses his plane and loses his job over the phone, the camera captures him in long shot from beneath, a tiny, isolated figure boxed within the window frame of a glass lookout point at the airport. The motif of isolation and confinement is again brought into focus. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Harvey removes the mobile from his ear and stands staring out of the vast glass window at the end of the concourse.

(32:38–32:44)

Although the “vast” airport window is audio described, the boxing-in of Harvey within the window frame and within the box-shaped frame of the concourse are not included. This loss of effect as the call in which he is fired ends, creates a consequential loss in understanding of the character’s frame of mind.

The merging of Harvey and Kate’s paths

Harvey’s next encounter with Kate is in a bar at the airport. They begin conversing with their backs to one another before Harvey moves diagonally to a table next to Kate. This movement signifies a development in their relationship, and as the space closes between them, their parallel, but separate lives begin to merge. When Harvey then pursues Kate through the carriage of a crowded airport shuttle, she is deep into the final pages of A Wayward Note by Anita Harmon. This fictitious title, which Kate holds in view, is a humorous device linking Kate to the lost and awkward musician, at the same time
communicating that she may play a part in his story. Following this, an exterior shot of the train serves to indicate that they are now moving in the same direction. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: On the train, she’s immersed in her book again. / Harvey’s spiky grey head suddenly appears at the other end of the compartment.
Harvey: [To other passengers] Sorry, I’m sorry.
AD: He peers over a man’s raised arm as he comes nearer to Kate.
(40:32–40:47)

AD: He struggles towards her with his case.
(41:04–41:06)

AD: The Heathrow express whizzes on along the suburban track.
(41:27–41:29)

The title of Kate’s book does not appear in the AD, which, although not essential, is a lost opportunity for humour and the inclusion of motif. Harvey’s laboured passage through the crowded shuttle towards Kate is included, however, along with the train’s fast forward movement, which appropriately connote the overcoming of barriers and the beginning of their journey together.

It is a bright day as they walk away from the Marriott hotel (where Harvey notably moves to the kerbside of Kate), through Trafalgar Square and across the Golden Jubilee Bridge to the Southbank. There is no dialogue only an upbeat musical theme. And with a backdrop of statues, river and bridges, this sequence signals an end to their lonely confinement inside buildings, vehicles and darkness. Their dialogue and passage along the Thames takes place beneath leafy trees, in front of tall ornamental grasses, between stalls of books and past street entertainers, with London offering a romantic setting for the development of their affection. The sequence ends with a view across the Thames as Harvey tearfully admits that his family is embarrassed by him, and Kate accepts to go to his daughter’s reception. The toll of Big Ben can be heard in the background in emphasis of the significant moment. In the AD:
They walk off side-by-side. Having dropped off his luggage, he comes out of his hotel and they fall into step, he gallantly taking the pavement side. On Trafalgar Square, they walk down towards the fountains, then they cross the Hungerford Footbridge towards the Southbank, chatting all the way. [Laughter heard] From the delicate footbridge with its gleaming pylons and deck stays, they stroll along the embankment in front of the Festival Hall.

With the inclusion of the couple’s walking “side-by-side” and falling “into step”, their metaphorical ‘togetherness’ past fountains, across a bridge and along the river is successfully foregrounded in the AD.

There is a telling interlude near the beginning of this sequence where the action cross-cuts to Kate’s mother. Until this point in the narrative, this woman has been confined to her home, but she now crosses the threshold of her front door to retrieve a parcel left by a mysterious neighbour. Her movement towards and through the door accompanied by comical, tentative music, is significant, signalling a change that this lonely woman may simultaneously be becoming less preoccupied with Kate. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

She ventures down the hall. The shadow of the person outside is visible through the leaded, stain-glass panels. She peeps through the spyhole. The Polish neighbour wearing a heavily-patterned grey shirt is standing there with a parcel under his arm. As she looks away, he leaves the parcel on the doorstep. Through the spyhole, she sees him hurry down the front steps. She opens the door and bends down to pick up the heavy triangular-shaped parcel wrapped in brown paper and string. With a wary expression, looking right and left, she takes it inside.

The suspense of the character’s move towards the door is successfully conveyed in the AD through the use of “ventures down the hall”, “The shadow” and “peeps through the spyhole”. Her hesitation is also transferred via “wary expression” and “looking right and left”, as if she might be caught in something clandestine. The character’s physical crossing of the threshold is not included in the AD, although this may easily be assumed from the description of her opening the door and retrieving the parcel outside.
A further episode without dialogue in which Harvey takes Kate to purchase a dress for the wedding reception, is reminiscent of the much-replicated 'shopping scene' of romantic comedies such as *Pretty Woman* (Marshall, 1990) and *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Newell, 1994). The inappropriateness of the outfits Kate tries, together with the fast rockabilly tune on the soundtrack (a continuation of the diegetic street music on the Southbank), parallels the slapstick of this intertextual reference. In the AD:

**AD:** Inside, Harvey waits for her to try on one outfit after another. Corseted in satin. A brown sequenced gown. Ruffled flamenco. She gives him a little twirl. A flouncy nightie number. And finally, she appears out from behind the changing curtain in a sophisticated, black, knee-length, sleeveless dress that shows off her slender figure and long slim legs, accessorised with a pair of black stilettoes. Harvey applauds. She fluffs up her hair and he ushers her out of the shop.

(52:14–52:46)

Together with the fast music beats, the slapstick is partially conveyed in the clipped, listed descriptions of each outfit and the couple's final actions before leaving the shop. So, the sense of comedy and the opportunity to make an intertextual connection from the action is successfully afforded to the audience.

At the wedding reception, Harvey is still marginalised by the family where he and Kate are assigned to the children's table, before he interrupts the proceedings to make a speech as the rightful Father of the Bride. This is audio described as part of the action, which is cohesive with the dialogue. Towards the end of the reception sequence, there is an intimate moment where Kate and Harvey sit together, partially reflected in the black polished surface of a piano. This subtle reflection, which develops upon Harvey’s singular reflection at the beginning of the film, is not audio described, however, as the gentle diegetic piano piece is played.

The couple's evening ends with another setting outdoors in the courtyard of Somerset House, which captures the elegance and romance of the city. In contrast to the close-ups
in confined spaces before they met, Kate and Harvey are now captured in long-shot, tiny figures walking beside the fountains. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: It's dawn as they come into the magnificent courtyard of Somerset House.
Kate: [Inaudible snippets of dialogue]
AD: The rectangular fountain of water jets rising to various heights stands in the centre of the 18th Century courtyard.

(1:05:34–1:05:51)

The AD appropriately names and describes the characters' location, enveloping their courtship in the glorious romanticism of 18th Century architecture. In fact, the corresponding fountain jets become a focal point in this AD as classical music is heard on the soundtrack.

As Kate travels home in the early morning, her smiling face is reflected in the bus window; a sign that she is content in herself. This image is also a reversal of the motif in which Harvey is turned away from his melancholy reflection in mirrors and taxi windows. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: On the bus home, Kate wears a dreamy expression. / Closing her eyes, she scratches her forehead and lets her fingers hover over her lips.

(1:09:43–1:09:56)

Kate's “dreamy expression” and the touching of her lips in the AD go some way towards conveying the character's thoughts as she no doubt recalls her kiss with Harvey. Again, the reflection is excluded from the AD, however, with a loss of linkage between the visual motif and the shift in dynamics as the characters transition psychologically.
At the end of the film, the camera looks skywards, moving away from the couple as they walk off along the Southbank. The tiny figures move between an avenue of trees, becoming obscured by tree tops as the credits roll. The omniscient position of the camera signals an end to the tale. The audience is no longer privy to their story and although the future is unknown, a natural order appears to have been found in their lives. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: From behind and above, their two pale coloured raincoats disappear into the distance beneath the swaying branches of two rows of leafy plane trees.

(1:24:24–1:24:32)

The AD successfully conveys the position of the two similarly-dressed figures as they “disappear” off along the tree-lined path. So, although the “metalinguistic presence of the narrator” (Eco, 1979: 212), created by the camera’s elevated downward focus and moving away from the action, is not suggested to the target audience, they are left with an equivalent sense of the film’s coming to an end and the beginning of a new journey for the couple.

Film 9 – *Never Let Me Go* (Romanek, 2010)

DNA Films / Film4 / Fox Searchlight Pictures
Audio Description written and voiced by Roland Bearne of Deluxe

Based on the novel by Kazuo Ishiguro (2005), *Never Let Me Go* is an existentialist drama based around three main characters, Kathy, Ruth and Tommy, who are clones in an organ donor programme. According to the book’s author, this “immediately raises the question: what does it means to be human? […] What does it mean to have a soul?” (Ishiguro in the DVD extras, *The Secrets of Never Let Me Go* by Special Treats Productions, 2010).
**Dreamlike structure**

In the DVD extras, the director, Mark Romanek, explains that the structure is dreamlike:

> A good dream is [...] trying to tell you something that's true to help you. But it kinda couches it in symbols and metaphors, and I think this story does that. It's telling us something true, which is that our life is limited in length and that you don't want to come to the end of it and have major regrets.

He explains that this needs to be shown indirectly and aesthetically so as to be beautiful rather than tragic. Thus, every aspect of the colour scheme is controlled, with a modulated pallet of pastel shades. For this reason, the titles, credits and intertitles are laid against a background of muted colours. This is an important indicator of emotional restraint and is included in the AD in respect of the intertitles, with descriptions including the “pestle [sic] grey”, “pastel yellow” and “blue” light of the opening sequence; “The shot of the dormitory dissolves into a plain green background” (28:06–28:09) before the second act; and “The scene dissolves to a light brown background” (53:47–53:49) before the third act. At the end of the film, the AD describes the scene fading “to a light green pastel background” (1:32:52–1:32:56), which precedes “a series of pastel backgrounds” behind the end credits. These periodic descriptions of pastel shades, although extra-diegetic, are important in providing the target audience with a link between the different parts of the film, as well as some sense of the director's intention and the tone of the book that influenced the film. It should be noted, however, that the muted décor of the sets and of the characters' clothing are not included in the AD, although many references are made to the contrasting natural images, such as those of birds and bright countryside.

**The human clone**

The narrative of *Never Let Me Go* feels natural, despite the science fiction dimension of human cloning. The characters are also shown to be human despite a sheltered upbringing within the confines of Hailsham school. Before the audience is made aware of the children’s true nature, a sequence of lessons and activities near the beginning of the film reveals human behaviours and relationships. In a biology class, for example, the Headmistress, Miss Emily, gives a lesson on human reproduction using a model of a human skeleton and blackboard drawings. This lesson is an important prefiguration to the characters’ natural and individual compulsions and sets up the narrative concerning their relationships. It also makes the later revelation of their true nature unexpected, since they
were not conceived biologically, but rather by the “nonsexual” (*Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2006: 421*) method of cloning. As such, this scene links to the thematic question of whether, like humans, a clone has a soul. In the AD:

> [Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

**AD:** The class listen as Miss Emily uses a skeleton in her lecture. Kathy glances at Tommy.

(13:17–13:22)

In this description, there is no indication of the type of lecture Miss Emily is giving. These rudimentary images of human reproduction, essential to natural existence, are not transferred to the minds of the audience. This creates a loss in translation of the signifiers that connect to the film’s overarching themes. Of course, if included, Kathy’s glance at Tommy might have been misconstrued as lewd or mocking unless she could have been further described as ‘not listening’ or ‘bored’. The glance that features in the AD does, however, link to Kathy’s smiles at Tommy in subsequent shots in this sequence of school life, which are also audio described and, therefore, hints at a closeness between them.

Conversely, in a class in which Tommy and Kathy role-play an exchange in a café, there is an unblinking, almost resentful look on Ruth’s face as her lower jaw moves forward. In the context of the film, this subtle gesture seems to indicate that she is jealous or in some way hateful of their relationship. This is not included in the AD:

> [Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

**AD:** The gigglers watch sullenly.

(14:42–14:43)
With no indication of Ruth's individual expression, a first sign that she might be jealous of Tommy and Kathy is lost.

Another clue to the children’s true nature, which links with the Headmistress's lecture on smoking, is a row of small paper cups lined up in deep perspective beside milk bottles for the children in the morning. This type of cup, in which patients are commonly given medication, are familiar from institutional scenes in other films and are indicative of a regimentation in the children’s health. In the AD:

![Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

**AD:** Female students in their pyjamas file out of a dormitory and take a small paper cup and a bottle of milk each from a neat line.

(18:03–18:09)

The paper cup provides a subtle clue in the AD, which neatly describes the uniformity and, therefore, regulatory of the action. The audience might mistake the cup for a receptacle for the milk, however, and ‘paper pill cup’ may have been more appropriate in creating a health connotation.

After lights-out in a dormitory scene (from 15:04), there is a discussion between Ruth and Kathy in which Ruth speculates about which students will have sex first. Their immaturity is introduced by a shot of a doll on a beside locker (included in the AD) and childish paper cut-outs on the wall. The scene runs with slightly sinister music, a faint sound effect of wind blowing and a clock ticking in the background, a ticking that is heard again in act three, *Completion* (the name used for death following organ donation), and in the scene where Tommy and Kathy request a deferral of their donations.

*The outside world and social status*

Body language is an important signifier also showing emotional distance from the outside world. The students engender fear in Marie-Claude, for example, a visitor who selects pieces of their artwork for inclusion in her gallery. When she arrives at the school, her
shoulders are hunched and she looks afraid, as if of contagion. In the novel also, the children sense the woman's fear and plot ways of making her feel more uncomfortable. At this stage, the audience is still unaware of the children’s true nature, so subtle clues are important in creating intrigue and suspense. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: She walks nervously through a curious group of female students.  
(17:02–17:06)

The body language is not fully described here. The description of nervousness and the curiousness of the students is not enough to convey a deeper sense of fear in the visitor’s demeanour and leave the audience with a sense of foreboding.

Again, before the audience is told that the children are clones, there are scenes in which “the Sales” (school jumble sale) are discussed. There is a lead up to the Sales with the Headmistress promising the delighted children “a bumper crop”, and two men arriving in a van with boxes. On the day of the Sales, the soundtrack’s lively violin music turns sinister, however, as the camera runs along a table of items on sale. Everything donated from the outside world is old or broken, which is starkly symbolic of the children’s marginalised status. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: There are buttons, bits of broken toys, a lone hair curler. It’s all tat and rubbish. / A bundle of crayons, a mouthpiece from a recorder, a tape with no box.  
(19:24–19:35)
The AD clearly and succinctly relates the visual clues: the jumble of mismatched items, the “broken toys” and “tape with no box”, and conveys the emotion of the scene through the appropriate description of “tat and rubbish”. Knowing no better, the junk is treasure to most of the children. Kathy is the only one who walks slowly between the stalls, glancing at the tables, buying nothing.

The framing of Ruth in doorways

Tommy gives Kathy a cassette tape from the Sales, and she is later seen in the dormitory moving to the music, clutching a pillow. Ruth stands framed in the doorway looking at Kathy. Her expressionless and unmoving demeanour is sinister and visually shows an emotional distance between the girls. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Kathy stops swaying and opens her eyes. Sitting on her bed, she looks around the dormitory. Ruth is standing in the doorway. The two girls stare at one another.

(21:27–21:37)

This segment of AD is enough to set the scene and add distance between the characters, where they retain their positions and simply look at one another in an exchange that carries more emotion than dialogue. The description of Kathy on the bed and Ruth standing in the doorway is also a motif that provides cohesion with further scenes composed in a similar way, with a similar message. The composition is repeated in their home at the Cottages when the girls are older, for example, even though Ruth is now with Tommy. When Kathy removes her headphones, Ruth, who had been framed in the doorway in semi-darkness, enters the room smirking. Sinister piano notes are heard alongside the faint sound effect reminiscent of wind on a moor, which ends with the fast ticking of a watch (a repeated motif that leaves a feeling that time is running out). The technique of framing a character in a darkened doorway to create a sinister effect can be traced back to German Expressionism and Nosferatu (Murnau, 1922) in which the non-human figure of Count Orlok emerges from doorways as if from a coffin. This intertextual usage emphasises and expresses an ominous side to Ruth’s character, as her back-lit
form looks down ominously at Kathy, making her stand out as untrustworthy, but also as not quite human as she stands motionless in the darkened doorway. In the gloom and shadows, there is a feeling of oppression in which the doorway is an emotional threshold through which Ruth emerges to torment Kathy. In the AD:

[Images removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Kathy lies on her bed with her eyes closed listening to the cassette [love song heard]. / Her brow creased with emotion, Kathy opens her eyes. Ruth is silhouetted in the doorway.  

(49:33–50:09)

By describing Kathy’s location and outlining Ruth in the doorway, the AD is consistent with the motif. Kathy’s feelings listening to the tape that Tommy gave her are also hinted at in the AD, since her brow is said to be “creased with emotion”: an indicator of tormented thoughts, which have been with her since childhood when she first saw Ruth and Tommy holding hands.

There are many other examples of framing in doorways in this film. In a later scene, which follows a dispute between the two young women, Ruth does not enter Kathy’s bedroom, but slouches against the doorframe until Kathy responds to her conversation. The hesitation is not included in the AD (nor, in fact, are the three dried roses hanging from a coat hanger on the door, which is a metaphor, perhaps, for the three friends):

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Later, she’s in her bedroom, idly playing with a toy tortoise. Ruth comes in.  

(35:25–35:29)

With a five second pause before the dialogue begins, there is room to include Ruth’s lingering in the doorway in the AD. But, with its omission, there is a loss of tension
between the characters, which is an important and constant aspect of the narrative. Even after ten years apart, Kathy hesitates in a doorway when she visits Ruth in hospital. Suspenseful piano notes are heard as she waits before entering the ward. The AD reconstructs the action as follows:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

**AD:** Kathy, standing at a glass-panelled door. She gathers herself, then opens the door. She steps into the ward, stops and stares.

(57:44–57:54)

The hesitation is successfully conveyed in this AD and the dramatic pause as Kathy “gathers herself” before entering.

**Pathways and journeys**

Relationship issues between the friends have often seen Kathy alone. In one scene at Hailsham, the camera follows her walking slowly down a hedge- and tree-lined path before emerging part way through a gate where she spies Ruth and Tommy kissing on a bench (the same bench on which Kathy and Tommy were earlier described as sitting). The path acts as a corridor, a place of psychological confinement and a retarder of Kathy’s full knowledge of the situation, while at the same time transitioning her towards the truth that Tommy and Ruth are together. In this way, the corridor is a metaphorical channel and an essential part of the composition. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

**AD:** Later, Kathy walks alone down a leafy tunnel in the gardens. She walks through a wrought iron gate in a brick wall. With hurt etched on her face, she watches Tommy and Ruth sitting on the stone bench by the pond.

(26:09–26:22)
Each of the important elements of this composition are included in the AD: the “tunnel”, which is a skillful word choice channelling Kathy along as if in confinement and darkness despite the outdoors location in “leafy” gardens; the gate through which she sees the truth; and the bench by the pond where she was with Tommy previously herself. The only inaccuracy is the description of Kathy walking through the gate, since she does not cross the threshold and does not transition into Ruth and Tommy’s space.

In the next scene, Kathy packs a suitcase in the dim light of an empty dormitory. She is physically alone and alone in her thoughts, which is evident from the voiceover narration:

Kathy: They say girls are always mean to the boys they like. / So maybe Ruth had liked him all along. Maybe I should have teased him too.
AD: Sitting on her bed, Kathy, now older, is alone in the dormitory. She picks up the small case and another larger one from the floor and walks out of the dorm.

(27:19–27:44)

Again, the AD complements the emotion of the scene by describing Kathy as “alone in the dormitory”, which encourages questions of where the other children are who once occupied this space or why Kathy has lingered and what final moments she is holding onto before walking away past the line of beds.

When the action moves to the second act of the film, the scene is established by a shot of another ‘corridor’: a road through a dark tunnel of trees through which the friends transition towards a new chapter in their lives at the Cottages. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]
AD: From a driver’s eye view, a car heads down a leafy country lane. There’s a minibus on the road ahead. It splashes through a puddle at the roadside. Raindrops run down the window. Kathy is sitting in the back of the bus.
(28:20–28:33)

The tunnel of trees is absent from this AD, so a link to the motif and visual transitioning is lost to the audience. The inclusion of “From a driver’s eye view” is also surprising since there is no other vehicle on the road, solely the vehicle carrying the camera that is tracking the minibus as the film was made. This move from extra diegetic to diegetic content in the AD is somewhat experimental and deconstructionist. The audio-describer has crossed to the other side of the screen, relating the action from his own point of view as spectator. A car on the road close behind the minibus would also be unusual since the outside world has thus far kept a distance from the clones in the story and the film’s composition. Thus, this AD connotes a familiarity on different levels that does not correspond faithfully with the narrative.

The motif of journeying forwards along a pathway is repeated when the friends drive to Norfolk to track a possible human original from whom Ruth was cloned. Here, the pathways and roads, through constant repetition, begin to reveal themselves as a metaphor for Life, which moves forwards relentlessly in time, with some deviations and revelations along the way (including new paths and gateways). In this scene, their car moves down a hilly country road in early morning with tall hedgerows on either side and a wide, yet vague space below the horizon in distant perspective. The clones are moving forwards towards the unknown, but with Ruth’s hope of finding out who she is. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Cut to a Volvo estate driving down a country lane. A breeze ruffles the wild flowers in the hedgerows.
(36:51–36:56)

The description of “driving down a country lane” adequately captures the sense of forward movement, connoting the characters’ passage towards a new place both physically and emotionally. At the same time, the AD is aesthetically beautiful, framing the journey within
the natural beauty of the breeze and flowers, which contrasts with and complements the clones in the car, unnatural in their conception, yet natural in their desires and mortality.

Towards the end of the sequence in Norfolk, there is an intimate moment between Kathy and Tommy which begins on the bench of a pier. The camera shows their faces in close-up as sad violin music begins to play on the soundtrack. The pier is an immense corridor whose perspective disappears into the horizon. Tommy and Kathy are seated part-way down, not moving along it together. There is meaning in this composition; it is a possible sign of an interlude in their lives in which they are together emotionally. The sea, often associated with Life, seems not to represent their lives here, however, since they are suspended on a pathway above it, and, in their innocence, in moral elevation from the rest of humanity. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Kathy turns to Tommy and they gaze at one another. / Tommy breaks eye contact, thinking hard. He looks out to sea then back at Kathy. They are halfway down the long pier.

(43:53–44:13)

The emotional charge between the characters is successfully conveyed in the facial expressions, the pause, and in Tommy’s reflective glance “out to sea” in this AD. The AD also places the characters “halfway down the long pier”, which adequately conceptualises the corridor motif and offers the target audience opportunity to access metaphorical meaning.

The sea features again later in the film when the friends visit a beached boat. To reach the boat, they must pass through a gate and Tommy and Kathy must support the agitated and weakened Ruth along a pathway past the leafless trunks of tall pine trees. In symbology, vertical wood has religious connotations associated with the vertical (“transcendent”) limb of the Cross. Thus, in some symbols “the tree is given the form of a cross, or the cross the form of a leafless tree” (Cirlot, 2001: 870 of 9303). In this way, the composition of this scene offers meaning to their walk on a spiritual level. Their journey is also hindered by the ‘cross’ they have to bear, which is accentuated by the waning Ruth.
Just as the abandoned boat on the beach also, they do not sail through life normally, but are stranded and forsaken emotionally by mankind. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: They walk through pinewoods, Tommy and Kathy supporting Ruth. They emerge from the woods and walk through long grasses. Kathy folds her arms against the chilly wind. Tommy walks with the suffering Ruth. The grasses give way to a wide, flat, sandy beach with a small abandoned boat on the shore (01:05:05–01:05:22)

The content of this AD adequately captures the transition from wood to beach, including Ruth’s distress and the “abandoned boat on the shore”, which provides the target audience with enough elements to paint a subconscious metaphor from the imagery. As the author explains: “I structured the whole thing as a metaphor for why we face mortality” running away is “beyond their horizons” as you cannot escape your fate (Ishiguro in the DVD extras, The Secrets of Never Let Me Go by Special Treats Productions, 2010).

Corridors are telling indicators throughout the film of the isolation of the characters and their state of being different, as well as resigned to their fate. In the third part of the film, the colourlessness of Kathy’s life as a carer is reflected in the grey of her clothing, the concrete estate in which she lives and the dreary, overcast weather. The clock ticks loudly in her flat, and as she leaves for work, the camera follows her down the dim, enclosed and narrow corridor outside. She is alone, moving forward ceaselessly in her duties, closed off from the rest of the world. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]
AD: She walks down a tiled corridor, past other flats and later is driving in the rain, the windscreen wipers sweeping a regular beat across the glass.  
(55:07–55:13)

The AD includes the corridor and puts it into the literal context of being outside the flats, which retains a semiotic subtlety. The dreary weather which engulfs Kathy is also successfully included and skilfully accentuated in the description of the car’s windscreen wipers. The rhythm of the blades also mirrors the repetitive sound of the ticking clocks through the film, further punctuating the relentless movement in time and the monotony of Kathy’s life.

When Kathy visits Ruth in hospital, they take a walk down a corridor. The camera tracks the women from a low angle, which, together with the diffuse light from a distant window backlighting the silhouettes in their slow forward movement, dons the scene with solemnity and a dream-like quality. Their walk ends with a more brightly lit shot of the young women from the front, showing the emotion in their faces as Ruth talks about her appearance, her third donation and about being “switched off”. Moreover, the lighting now contrasts with the darkness, connoting a transition towards the light and a renewed friendship and understanding between them. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: They take a walk along a gleamingly-clean, dimly-lit corridor.  
(58:53–58:57)

AD: A long shot shows the pair in silhouette at the end of the corridor by a window.  
(1:01:00–1:01:04)

Although the “dimly-lit corridor” is included in the AD, there is little sense of drama in the first extract before the dialogue begins. And although the second extract of AD includes the technical framing of the silhouetted characters in a distant shot “at the end of the corridor by a window”, there is, again, no sense of metaphor in their moving from a position in darkness to the light.
Windows and vectors

In a subsequent shot, the repetitive pattern of the hospital windows is more than just visually striking. The repetition in deep perspective is synonymous with the ticking of the clocks, the rhythm of the wiper blades, the blowing of the breeze and the recurrent movement forwards along pathways. It is also synonymous with the endless manufacture of battery cloning, where there is sameness in the replicated shapes and in the multitude of donors facing the same fate on the other side of the soulless windows. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: The hospital has rows of angular windows. (1:01:12–1:01:14)

Again, some sense of drama is missing from the imagery in this description where the repetitive shape of hundreds of windows is excluded, creating some loss in meaning and motif.

Windows are another of the film's motifs, reflecting deeper meanings in the narrative. For example, when the friends find Ruth's potential 'original' in Norfolk, they are separated from her by a large window pane, and it is through a car window that Ruth will watch Kathy and Tommy embrace (from 1:03:15) (action which is audio described).

In an earlier scene at the Cottages, Tommy approaches Kathy, separated from her behind the balusters of a staircase before they leave the house together. Pleasant orchestral music and birdsong begin as they walk towards the fields while Ruth is framed in a pane of a partially-open upstairs window. These images are significant in visually revealing the characters’ feelings. First, the balusters indicate a barrier between Tommy and Kathy, which cuts the view of him diagonally in half. Tommy is painfully timid in his advances, particularly since his girlfriend is upstairs. So, this barrier signifies his reticence, as well as pointing upwards towards Ruth as he is ‘cut in half’ emotionally. The subsequent birdsong and pleasant music indicate a natural order when Tommy and Kathy walk off alone, and the shot of Ruth's unsmiling face framed in the window is distanced from the pair. At that
moment, the triangular space occupied by the three friends shifts, with Ruth extrapolated to a distant corner. The framing also serves as a device showing Ruth’s consideration of the situation. The fact that the window is also partially-open also indicates that she might be listening and so is a sign that she understands what is going on. In the AD:

[Images removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Kathy turns and smiles at Tommy. He fidgets awkwardly.
Tommy: Where are you going?
Kathy: I thought I’d go for a walk.
Tommy: Does that mean... you w-want to be alone?
AD: Kathy’s smile broadens at Tommy’s crippling gaucheness. They walk away from the red brick farm house together. Tommy jumps in a puddle. / They follow a path across fields towards misty woods. / Net curtains part and Ruth watches them.

(30:32–31:03)

Although the balusters of the staircase are not mentioned in the AD, the description of Tommy’s fidgeting and “gaucheness” inside the house compared to his more carefree jump into a puddle outside reveals much of the sense of the scene, although limits any connection with Ruth upstairs. The “net curtains” in the AD also place Ruth behind a window, although she is not noted as being upstairs, above them or at a distance. As such, the AD only partially communicates the visual messages afforded to the sighted audience.

Another partially-open window appears in the scene where the children are told their life’s purpose. This scene begins with a blurred exterior shot of the imposing school building in the rain, which in the next shot seeps through a barely-open window beside a bottle of dead flowers on a table (from 21:39). The dreary atmosphere created through these poignant signifiers punctuates the scene with morbidity and is introduced in the AD as follows:
Rain drips from an open sash window. A breeze ruffles a pot of dried flowers and a map hanging on a chalk board. The class sit glumly at their desks staring at Miss Lucy.

(21:45–21:56)

This AD is almost poetic. There is rhythm in the clipped sentences, which are abound with the original visual metaphors: the rain, the open window, the flowers and the movement caused by the breeze juxtaposed by the stillness and focus of the figures in class. The description of “dried flowers” is inaccurate, however, since the flowers are dead and neglected rather than deliberately arranged, although other than this mediation, the AD could be considered to successfully and artistically capture the mood of this scene and strongly link with the themes of the film.

A window is also used to create linkage between the beginning and the end of Never Let Me Go during a repetition of the same moments in the narrative where Kathy watches Tommy through the glass window of an operating theatre with the rhythmic sound of a heart monitor beeping diegetically. The window is screen-like in shape with Kathy’s silhouette framed in front of it watching, so creates an aspect of self-reflexivity to the opening and closing of the film. A reverse shot also shows Tommy’s reflection over Kathy in the window. He is part of her, yet ephemeral, no longer there, which is soon confirmed by a monotone sound from the heart monitor. In the opening AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Seen in silhouette from behind, a woman stands looking through glass into a hospital operating theatre crammed with equipment.

(01:40–01:47)
AD: Reflections in the glass show surgical staff in white gowns wheeling a trolley into the room.

(02:01–02:06)

The AD successfully conveys the young woman’s position in respect of the glass as well as the reflections on the glass as the camera angle reverses, providing the audience with clues to the visual messages. At the end of the film, the AD is similar although not precisely the same, and although the film images are mirrored, the slight change in wording in the AD is inconsequential since the characters and story are now known.

Lost friends

The film’s final voiceover narrative is taken directly from the book. Standing by a field, Kathy imagines that this is the place where everything she has lost since childhood will be “washed up” and where Tommy might appear over the horizon. This concept reminds the audience of loan or ‘abandoned’ objects appearing earlier in the film, such as an unclaimed cricket ball in the field outside the school boundary and jumble items at the Sales, each of which are visual propositions in themselves. The shapes formed by pieces of plastic caught on the barbed wire fence bordering the field also echoes a shot of a single dress blowing on a washing line at the Cottages the day that Kathy leaves. The dress is juxtaposed with a shot of Ruth on her own, just as Kathy is now alone in the final scene. In the related AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: A dress is hanging on a washing line.

(52:30–52:32)

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]
AD: Torn remnants of plastic bags caught on a fence flutter in the breeze.  
(1:31:06–1:31:11)

There is time to say more in this first extract of AD at the Cottages. It is a lone dress blowing in the wind with fields in the background. The AD might also have mimicked the AD of rubbish caught on the barbed wire fence, fluttering in the breeze at the end of the film, which may have produced a more coherent relationship between these visual metaphors and their potentiality for meaning for the audience.

**Film 10 – *Up in the Air* (Reitman, 2009)**

Audio Description by Matthew Vickers of ITFC

Ryan Bingham, a redundancy consultant whose goal it is to reach ten million frequent-flyer miles as he travels across the States firing people, enjoys casual encounters with a business woman as their schedules cross in transit. The life of the main character is literally and figuratively ‘up in the air’. He is devoted to his job and the transient lifestyle, finding meaning in loyalty schemes and in-flight and hotel bar relationships. When he is temporarily grounded by his firm to save costs, he starts to think more seriously about the woman and his family. This film asks what is important in life and what ‘baggage’ we are willing to carry with us in our metaphorical backpacks. The themes, therefore, link to the characters’ misplaced loyalties and the isolation of their lives in “Airworld”, a term coined by Walter Kirn (2001) in his novel of the same title on which the film is based.

*The loyalty motif*

A major motif in the film is Bingham’s loyalty to American Airlines as he amasses huge amounts of air miles. There are a number of shots of billboards advertising this airline featuring an aeroplane in the colours of the American flag, a pilot and the slogan: “We value your loyalty”. These images culminate in the character’s achieving ultimate status: his ten millionth mile, rewarded by an exclusive loyalty card presented in-flight by the airline captain featured in the poster. The poster motif is, therefore, indexical: a clue to the character’s motivation. Bingham feels valued, an American of status and purpose as he amasses more miles, although he will later discover this goal to be anti-climactic and empty. The first sighting of the poster is handled in the AD as follows:
AD: He glances at a poster for American Airlines with the slogan "We value your loyalty".

(17:35–17:39)

By including Bingham’s glance at the poster, this description connects him with the motif in both its literal and figurative forms. The ‘loyalty’ slogan is also introduced to the target audience, which communicates a deeper message suggestive of the type of relationship that might be valued and, therefore, meaningful in the character’s life, in sharp contrast to the lack of loyalty that will be shown to family and American workers in the film. However, since there is no indication in the AD of the plane’s colours, there is a lesser sense of patriotism. The audio describer also neglects to describe the airline captain with the large moustache who will later present Bingham with his loyalty reward, making his dream tangible and Bingham part of the advertised myth.

As a frequent flyer, Bingham shows greater loyalty to the companies he patronises than to his own family. He assigns value and status to his collection of loyalty cards. These cards are, in turn, a symbol of the illusory happiness of the frequent flyer. As such, when the main protagonist has a change of heart and races to be with the woman he has fallen for, it is significant that he overlooks to hand over his Hertz Gold Club membership card before speeding away; an oversight that is not audio described since it is included in the dialogue. The film’s own brand patronage, the signs of corporate funding in some instances, is integral to the story and therefore prevalent in the dialogue. The AD does not need to reinforce this, but complements the film’s language by adding brand names where appropriate.

**Social disconnection**

In a further scene, a couple dramatically reunite in front of a billboard with the same American Airlines image and slogan, with the woman throwing herself into the arms of her man, who is holding a red rose (a common symbol of love). Bingham passes alone in the
foreground wheeling his suitcase, looking straight ahead. There is no one to meet him at the airport and his voiceover narration indicates a man unhappy to be home:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

Ryan: [Narrating] Last year, I spent 322 days on the road, which means I had to spend 43 miserable days at home.

(17:54–18:00)

This is a powerful image in the context of Bingham's social disconnection and prefigures the next scene in which he returns to a small, unwelcoming apartment. Because of the voiceover, there is no time to describe the couple in front of the billboard and the audio describer has no choice but to keep pace with the action as it cuts to Bingham's home:

AD: In his apartment block, Ryan pulls his case along a hall / He lets himself into his small, sparsely-furnished apartment.

(18:01–18:08)

The character's isolation is felt in the AD, however. The ever-present suitcase being pulled along a hallway likens the location to a hotel. The location is also constricting and impersonal, which is confirmed by the AD of a confined and sparse apartment interior.

The emptiness and isolation of the main characters' transient lifestyle is further conveyed by the framing of figures in hotel, airport and aeroplane windows. Again, windows are framing devices, enclosing the characters in a particular environment and distancing them from the outside world. In the windows in the film, the characters are also shown separated from each other by the frames and walls between them. In the windows of the Hilton Hotel, for example, Bingham and his young co-worker, Natalie, are shown in isolation. In the AD:
AD: Wearing a white dressing gown, he sits on the bed in his hotel room / He takes a wedding invitation from an envelope and studies it [4 second pause before further AD]

(36:43–36:51)

Despite adequate time to include some reference to the exterior shot of these characters framed under the huge neon ‘H’ of the hotel logo, this is excluded from the AD. The aesthetic, connotational values of both the framing and the brand image, where the characters are tiny, loyal subordinates, is thus lost to the target spectator.

Towards the end of the film, Ryan’s solitary face is shown looking out of an aeroplane portal. Now realising the value of grounded relationships, but having been cheated in love, his image is constricted and metonymic. Moreover, in contrast to his voiceover narration at the beginning of the film: “I’m the aisle, you’re the window–trapped” (which features in the opening of Kirn’s novel), it is now Bingham who is ‘trapped’ in the window seat, a lonely figure lost in Airworld looking down at the real world. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Ryan looks out the window of a jet as it rises into the sky.

(1:07:07–1:07:10)

This description includes the jet’s window and conjures an image of a jet rising into the sky, but in the context of the narrative, inadequately conveys the character’s confinement, despite a further three seconds in which additional description might comfortably have
been inserted. Airworld is no longer Bingham’s refuge, but a weight in his proverbial backpack, yet this does not come across in the AD.

As the cold wind howls outside yet another hotel room, Ryan is shown in long-shot, a tiny figure framed within the frame of a window, within a row of parallel windows. Like a small object in a display cabinet, he is trapped and isolated in this transitory world, with his elevation and distance from the viewer conveying an even greater sense of remoteness. In the AD:

[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]

AD: Ryan’s solitary figure is framed by one of a row of tall windows in the nondescript hotel block

(1:29:57–1:30:01)

The sense of Ryan’s confinement and isolation as a “solitary figure” “framed” in the row of windows is now successfully conveyed in the AD. The addition of the “nondescript” block, is also effective in proposing the characterlessness of his existence, simply and succinctly providing the audience with an equivalent image.

A visual sense of emptiness is also evident in the scene in which Natalie is seated alone looking at the floor in a glass room full of unoccupied office chairs. This scene follows her role in the redundancy of a number of workers. The fired employees have all gone, which is signalled by the empty chairs. It is night, and there is disorder in the restricted space. Natalie’s desolation after a long day dealing with emotionally-charged human beings is evident, she is outcast and alone, her psychological suffering mirrored in the physical composition, with the windows serving to further disconnect her from the outside world as well as placing her in a ‘glass bowl’ as the camera looks down on her, a specimen of vulnerability holding onto her belongings. In the AD:
Ryan finds Natalie sitting in a room crammed full of office chairs.

**AD:**

**Ryan:** You okay?

**AD:** She gets up holding her coat

**Natalie:** Can we go now?

**Ryan:** Yeah.

(43:09–43:18)

While there is limited time for AD in this scene, the describer manages to convey the dynamic of a busy space “crammed” with chairs. There is, however, time to have included the words ‘alone’ or ‘glass’ room, which would have added definition to the image and may have charged Natalie’s: “Can we go now?” with further emotion.

**Title motif and graphics**

The film opens with a sequence of snapshots of uniform fields and cities from an aerial perspective to a backdrop of light-hearted music. These signifiers provide strong genre clues to the universe of the film, as a journey, and signal a form of transitioning or fracture in the way in which the different ‘postcard’ views from an aeroplane are brought in. In the AD:

[Images removed due to Copyright restrictions]
AD: Fluffy white clouds float in a blue sky. Way down below is the ever-changing landscape of the United States of America. Lush mountains, densely packed cities and vast patchworks of fields [song lyrics heard: “This land is your land...”]

(00:31–00:43)


(01:25–01:33)

Between reading the titles, these extracts of AD appropriately capture the feel of the title sequence by listing views of the United States from the air and noting the split screen, which fragments the aerial journey, and goes on to list further views before Bingham’s jet comes into land. The AD is, therefore, successful in setting up the film’s genre and providing clues to the nature of the film and traveller. The theme of being ‘up in the air’ is emotionally significant from the respect of relationships and redundancy. During the end credits, a voice recording of Kevin Renick is heard and his song of the same title is played (01:41:52–01:42:09). Renick composed the song following his redundancy and sent the track to the director. It is a poignant reminder of the struggles faced by real people, and as such, grounds the film in real life. It is, therefore, appropriate that the audio describer pauses from his reading of the end credits to allow this recording and the beginning of the song lyrics, “I’m up in the air...” to be heard.

4.3. **Semiotic data patterns in the film and AD content analysis**

The preceding film and AD content analysis sought to respond to each of the three research questions:

(i) What visual forms are important to connotational significance in mainstream film and how can they be understood?

(ii) Do AD texts attend to connotational forms appropriately?
(iii) What value does the audio description of visual signifiers have for target users?

Response to research question 1 required the identification and evaluation of paradigmatic and syntagmatic constructions at fixed points in the narratives and in the overall progression of the plots. This analysis required an understanding of the 'specialised' codes of film construction (pertaining to framing, lighting and camera movement, for example) and how the generic codes of film and social culture might be incorporated to produce further levels of significance. Each film was analysed separately as an individual sign system with its own thematic and stylistic constructions. And by treating the films individually, it was possible to interpret intention by way of repeated motifs and to see how sign forms relate to each other to produce structure and added significance. Of course, not all film imagery is intentionally meaningful (Gaut, 1997: 150–153). Gestures, for example, are not necessarily social, but may be reflex actions (Barthes, 1977: 74), which means that visual connotation was not continually observed, but appeared periodically through each film.

In response to research question 2, the semiotic content needed to be evaluated in terms of audio description, where the accompanying AD texts were assessed for their potential to convey the visual signifiers found in equivalent verbal terms within the soundtrack timeframes. This meant taking into account what needed to be prioritised for a cohesive story, as well as any other semiotic features occurring simultaneously. The outcomes of this analysis were intended to show how the connotational messages of mainstream films might be successfully incorporated in the verbal form of AD using straightforward and succinct language, but also where inconsistencies occur, including partial or inappropriate transfer or where content of importance is excluded.

In response to research question 3, concerning the value of visual signifiers for AD users (its potential to convey aesthetic intention and meaning, for example), where transfer was deemed partial or inappropriate or a form was not presented in the AD text despite the scope to do so, this was considered a potential loss of meaning or entertainment value. It was accepted, however, that the data from the small supplementary studies of AD sample testing and semi-structured interviews with participants would more directly responded to research question 3, so the primary data concerning user perception, comprehension and preferences, and ultimately value, has been treated separately under chapter 5.

The main purpose of the film and AD content analysis in section 4.2 was to identify and understand the semiotic features of film construction important to connotational meaning.
and their handling in audio description. When imagery is significant, it “signifies something quite different from what it shows” though it does so through what it shows” (Mitry, 2000: 39). These forms were, therefore, understood through the identification and analysis of common film form and the shared codes of language and culture, despite originality in stylistic usage and the diverse contexts in which sign forms may be placed in texts (Nida, 1964: 31). Such diversity also makes the classification of sign forms challenging. However, just as “patterned relations” between constructions (dialogue, body language, props and imagery, etc.) assist in the interpretative process of meaning-making in media (Baldry and Thibault, 2005: 21), shared qualities might be grouped and compared intertextually across collections of similar material. From the qualitative analysis, therefore, even though some of the films demonstrate a greater tendency towards stylistic construction (Black Swan, for example, which is intensely artistic, and Never Let Me Go, which is a complex dramatisation of a literary work), patterns of visual signification created from the same fundamental techniques are widely discernible and interpretable across all of the films explored. To more systematically understand the patterns arising from the qualitative analysis in section 4.2 and directly respond to the research questions, this section evaluates the results under the common general headings of film construction: genre, mise-en-scène, camera techniques and montage, with supporting comments on music and sounds. Bearing in mind that signs can be defined under more than one group (indexical, iconic or symbolic) (Chandler, 2007: 44) and that elements of film construction might similarly pertain to more than one category, the signifiers observed have been classified according to their most relevant function and signification.

4.3.1. Genre

As detailed in section 2.1.2, the ‘text type’ of a mainstream film is generally known as its ‘genre’, which relates to its general classification: drama, action adventure, romantic comedy, science-fiction, historical epic, war film, and so on, although categories are flexible (Lehman and Luhr, 2008: 124). The coded patterns of genre are formulaic meaning that films exhibit a number of signifiers that alert audiences to the types of films that they are watching (Berger, 1991: 8). This includes the 10 mainstream films analysed in methodological step 1 of this research, which fall under several different classes of genre and whose signifying forms provide indications of genre from the outset. The title sequences of The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, Brokeback Mountain, The King’s Speech, Casino Royale and Up in the Air, for example, each reflect the film genre. The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas is a wartime dramatisation whose opening moments are dominated by the Nazi flag, followed by a sequence of shots of people in 1940s clothing, some of whom
are loaded into trucks, whilst others move freely. By association, these familiar signifiers signal World War II and indicate a story relating to the Holocaust. The sprawling landscape in the opening of *Brokeback Mountain* also, together with the soundtrack’s guitar twangs reminiscent of Morricone’s scores in films such as *A Fist Full of Dollars* (Leone, 1964), the cowboy and screen text: “Wyoming 1963”, are indicative of a western, although one set in more recent times. In the opening of *The King’s Speech*, the art deco room, radio microphone and period clothing, accompanied by classic orchestral music, signal an historical drama. Conversely, the dynamic graphic sequence in the opening credits of *Casino Royale*, featuring silhouetted gunmen, blood, hearts and playing cards, lead the audience to expect a more modern, fast action formula. Finally, the multiple snapshot aerial views in the opening of *Up in the Air*, together with the upbeat soundtrack, are indexical of a light-hearted drama in some way related to flying.

Some of these signifiers are suggestive of genre by way of association and analogy, providing clues for (sighted) audiences to decipher as they engage with the fictional worlds. In the film diegesis, these features are denotative, existing and functional in real time, although in the construction of film, some are expressly chosen or manipulated to express wider ideas. The films analysed also feature objects distinguishing their genre, including the guns and fast vehicles of *Casino Royale*, which are indexical of the power and virility of the 007 action hero. Danesi describes the automobile, for example, as “an extension of sexual persona” since the owner’s gender and personality are reflected in the type of car they drive (1999: 60), and for the same reason analogous interpretations might be made of other objects, such as weapons, in certain contexts. The German staff car in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, which pertains to the war genre, is another vehicle, which, by extension, can be interpreted symbolically, although in this context as an instrument of the Third Reich propelling the family towards its fate. The clock that runs backwards in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* is, conversely, a fabular object connotative of Time, rejuvenation, memory and nostalgia, which signals the genre of fantasy. As previously outlined, a translator’s knowledge of a source language, cultural contexts and stylistic devices are essential in the determination of a text’s communicative “purpose” (Nida, 1964: 43) (see section 2.2.3), which in film AD, will include a familiarity with the paradigmatic features of genre, such as the common forms of title sequences, clothing and objects, colour schemes and lighting. The visually-impaired user may already have an idea of a film’s genre from what they have read or heard in advance of making their film selection. However, it is only through the audio description of appropriate features that these viewers will more fully connect with the genre they have accessed and with the wider messages of connotation occasioned.
From the AD of the majority of the films studied, the visually-impaired audience would be in little doubt as to the genre of film they were watching from the regular denotative descriptions of furnishings, clothing, vehicles, etc., coupled with the tone of music and dialogue. However, an absence of key signifiers from the AD of films of a more subversive or overtly stylised nature prohibits their equitable appreciation by target users. In some cases, this is unavoidable due to the prioritisation of other elements that may be more useful or interesting to the AD audience, although there is little explanation for other mishandlings in image transfer. The most notable example of this was found in the audio description of *Black Swan*, wherein content on a basic story level, which places the action in and around a young woman’s home and ballet company, is regularly audio described, yet a great deal of the connotative imagery pertaining to the more artistic and psychological nature of the drama is missing, producing an inconsistent and inequitable text. For example:

*Black Swan*. The title is white letters on black.  
(01:07–01:12)

At Leroy’s opulent flat, there’s a desk, exercise equipment and a grand piano.  
(34:39–34:42)

The first sample of AD is the straightforward description of the film’s title, with its subject (“Black Swan”) in white on a black background. This AD very successfully and implicitly captures the essence of *Black Swan* by proposing the intentionally classic and symbolic opposition of white and black (Cirlot, 2001: location 1962 of 9304), as representative of good versus evil in the traditional fairy tale. In the second sample of AD, however, despite the many strongly opposing visual signifiers in the scene at Leroy’s apartment (the respective white and black clothing of the characters, the black and white furnishings and the large black-on-white print of a Rorschach personality test), only the character’s wealth and an interest in fitness are indicated to the target audience to the detriment of the stylistic and psychological personality of the imagery. The level of stylistic construction in *Black Swan*, which blurs the boundaries between the realities of diegesis, filmmaking and theatre, is a crucial aspect of what this film is about, with its self-referential character (a sub-type of genre) most manifest in the explicit force of the black and white and mirror imagery, together with the subtext of dual existence (or ‘cloning’). However, the nature of *Black Swan* does not come across in the audio description of this film despite the inclusion of some additional technical language used in the linking of scenes (‘cut to’, ‘the scene snaps to black’, and ‘cross-fade’, for example). It is interesting to note that in the
AD text of *Never Let Me Go* of the same year, the same audio describer has included references to the muted colour scheme of the titles and intertitles, which contributes to the sombre tone of this less-traditional coming-of-age drama, although has not described the subdued tone of the décor, the reasons of which are unclear.

A further sub-type of genre, which subverts the traditional signifiers, is parody, which is also inconsistently handled in some of the AD explored. In both *Brokeback Mountain* and *Casino Royale*, for example, there is an undercurrent of imitation in which the signifiers of the traditional western (the white/black cowboy hats and macho characterisations, for example), and those of the traditional ‘Bond’ film (the suave secret agent and objectified females), are, respectively, deconstructed (although much of the ‘Bond’ formula is also preserved in the construction of *Casino Royale*). In *Brokeback Mountain*, for example, although one character is introduced as wearing a “dark Stetson”, neither of the descriptions of the other character mentions the light colour of his cowboy hat. This loss of signifier, which is a deliberate proposition of the stereotype of good versus bad from the traditional Hollywood western, means a loss of the traditional ideals that will be challenged in this film as the narrative develops. Conversely, in *Casino Royale*, the emergence of James Bond from the sea in parody of the classic ‘Bond girl’ entrance, is fully-audio described, with the opportunity taken to objectify the male character in a description of his “toned muscular torso”.

As pointed out above, the omission of important signifiers can sometimes be justified in the hierarchising of the audio-visual content. The AD of the title graphics of *Casino Royale*, for example, which signal the action adventure of the ‘Bond’ genre, is fairly minimal in comparison to the imagery:

Bond fires through the aperture of a camera lens. Blood seeps down across the lens.  
(03:35–03:41)

An animated sequence shows deadly playing cards and Bond shooting to kill [theme song begins].  
(03:47–03:50)

Although these AD texts incorporate a classic ‘Bond’ gunshot directly into the camera and the “aperture” imagery, which mimics the opening sequences of other ‘Bond’ films, these segments of AD are brief in relation to the creative animation. The full nature of the sequence is, therefore, lost, including the covert message that this Bond may be different not least because the objectified women moving in silhouette, which is a classic
introduction to many of the films in the series, are missing. Instead, the audio describer has prioritised Chris Cornell’s ‘Bond’ theme, You Know My Name (2006), giving the visually-impaired audience the best opportunity to appreciate the title track, as an important and iconic aspect of the ‘Bond’ franchise, before the main action begins. This prioritisation can be considered appropriate and a necessary loss in translation, also since the more hardened nature of the character has previously been revealed in the prologue, including in the audio description.

In summary, the prototypical genre signifiers found in the mainstream films analysed (period dress and sets, for example), carry obvious denotative significance and are regularly audio described. Many of these will have clear connotational meanings, the guns and fast cars of action films, for example, which imply a certain character image. However, the occasional subversion or stylisation of established genre forms is not always picked up by audio describers, which limits opportunities for the target audience to form sub-textual understandings from the manipulation of convention. Other than in the audio description of Black Swan, this inconsistency was found to be fairly minimal, although a deviation from a filmmaker’s intention constitutes a loss of subtle, yet important, genre signifiers, which makes an AD text inequitable nevertheless.

4.3.2. Mise-en-scène

The mise-en-scène, or composition of scenes in mainstream films, was defined in chapter 2 as the deliberate selection, positioning and lighting of multiple elements within a space so as to represent a particular reality and express a number of ideas. As outlined in section 2.1.2, connections can be made between these elements (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 79), which can be used to semiotic effect, transmitting connotative messages to audiences. As previously stated, the aspects of composition, which create form and atmosphere, are very much integral to the viewer’s experience (Lehman and Luhr, 2008: 57), so to omit or mishandle these features in film AD would be to reduce the target user’s access to meaning. Again, translations should aim to include “subtleties of meaning” in addition to more overt information (Nida, 1964: 150) and seek “equivalent effect” (Nida, 1964: 164) wherever possible in the language transferred. As outlined in section 2.2.3, formal equivalence, which retains source features and meanings, may be the most appropriate method of transfer in AD to verbalise visual elements of film without alteration to the original values. Whether this was found to be successfully achieved in AD practice is summarised below under the subcategories of environment; framing; colour
and lighting; objects; and motif, due to the extensive patterns of data observed in the composition of the films analysed.

Environment

The environments of a film form a contextual backdrop for the action in different scenes. But in its own right, the environment might also be read symbolically. Corridors, pathways and roads, for example, which feature prominently in the research data, can be used to visually represent the spiritual journeys or psychological transitioning of characters. These environments can be confining or isolated spaces that place the characters in a state of disconnect whilst transitioning them from one place to another both physically and symbolically, and depending on whether a character is moving away or towards the camera and from how far, different interpretations might be made, including by the visually-impaired spectator where included in the AD. For example, the lonely mountain roadway and crossroads shot at dawn in the opening sequence of Brokeback Mountain are strongly connotative of a new chapter and turning point in Ennis's life as the truck he is in approaches the camera from some distance. In The King's Speech, the long path taken by Bertie and Logue through Regent's Park runs parallel to their increasingly heated conversation and is symbolic of an evolution in their relationship, particularly as the scene ends with Logue left far behind. Similarly, the long clinical corridor preceding an explosive argument between the main characters in Revolutionary Road is a channel for their emotional development and represents the way their life is heading. In Never Let Me Go, the dormitory, school pathway, roadways, pier, hospital corridor and woodland path to the beach, all of which are devoid of human beings, represent the relentless forward movement of the clones through life towards ‘completion’ (death). Moreover, the deserted and labyrinthine hotel corridor in Last Chance Harvey is an image that deeply contrasts with the long romantic walk along the Thames as Harvey transitions from loneliness and rejection towards a new relationship and reconciliation. And the apartment and airport corridors, together with the physical air journeys in Up in the Air are connotative of Bingham’s psychological state of being emotionally ‘up in the air’ with regards to relationships and family, as well as of his transitioning towards new values and realisations.

Buildings are another type of environment with connotational significance (Cirlot, 2001: location 3850–3869 of 9304; Danesi, 1999: 141), such as the home, which regularly features in the visual propositions of the mainstream films studied. For example, Kate’s mother in Last Chance Harvey is never seen to leave her home, which represents the
psychological confinement of her loneliness. In Black Swan, the childish pink bedroom is connotative of Nina’s sexual immaturity. The camera’s lingering on an empty bedroom in the old people’s home in The Curious Case of Benjamin Button as the voiceover narration talks about death, is indexical of the occupant’s demise. And the neat and empty living room free of packing boxes towards the end of Revolutionary Road is important signifying imagery indicative of a return to order in the home (although being devoid of people, seems equally to indicate some loss or absence, which foreshadows April’s suicide). Moreover, the contrast between the opulent Berlin home and the forbidding house near the concentration camp in The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas is profoundly connotative of contrasting realities and the increased mirroring of Bruno’s life with that of the Jewish boy, Shmuel, behind the camp fence. Finally, the stark institutional-style building featured in the prologue of Casino Royale is connotative of the Cold War setting of Flemings original novel (1953), a message that is made more expressive in the retro black and white imagery of the sequence; and the casino, together with the unknown variables of the card game, allegorise the characters’ own deadly games of deception.

The natural environment is also used symbolically in the mainstream films explored. In The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, a stretch of woodland forms a boundary between Bruno’s world and that of the boy at the camp and represents a symbolic divide between freedom and imprisonment, and between the child’s naivety and the stark realities of the Holocaust. Bruno’s adventure through the woods in sunshine also sharply contrasts with the family’s journey through the woods in the rain at the end of the film as they cross towards the terrifying realisation of Bruno’s death. As also seen in Never Let Me Go, a transition through woodland can be significant on an existential level. When the three friends in the film cross through woodland to the wide open space of a beach and sea, it is with a feeling of hope in seeing the abandoned boat that they have heard about, although with the dual concept of their not being able to move beyond this point (the boat being beached) or to change the order of things. The mountain in Brokeback Mountain is a further example of how the natural landscape can be used symbolically where it comes to represent the powerful love story between the main protagonists. But as events evolve and their relationship ends, the mountain is used metonymically, a signifier for incompleteness and loss, where only a postcard view remains.

As observed in the film analysis, the handling of contextual space on a figurative level (the denotative road trip, which symbolically represents a character’s life, or the idea of a building as representing a human persona or psychology (Cirlot, 2001: location 3850–3869 of 9304), for example), is often achieved in the AD by way of the straightforward
description of locations and what the characters are doing there, such as Harvey and Kate's long walk past the historical sites of London in *Last Chance Harvey*, which represents the beginning of a romantic journey together. However, the sometimes metaphorical, psychological or stylistic nature of film environments is not always realised in the AD. This can sometimes be due to limited time, for instance in the Regent’s Park scene of *The King’s Speech*, where it is impossible to realise the implications of the imagery in the AD due to the continuous dialogue. However, there is often little explanation for the omission of important features. In the opening to *Brokeback Mountain*, for example, although a number of essential signifiers are introduced in the AD, the crossroads at which Ennis is dropped is in no way described as a juncture. The audio description of the corridor scene before April and Frank’s argument in *Revolutionary Road* also only partially conveys the sterile and restrictive environment in which the couple find themselves both literally and figuratively, although the woman is said to be walking slightly behind the man, which connotes a lesser social status. In the same film, the contrasting static image of the woman in the home as the man goes to work, which confirms the traditional stereotypes, is also audio described, although the stylistic, almost choreographic journey of the men is only partially conveyed in the AD. In the opening of *The King’s Speech* also, where there is time to include the feeling of claustrophobia implied by the enclosed stairwell and blocked entrance to the stadium, the audio describer omits these signifiers, preferring to tell the audience explicitly that the Duke is nervous. In the AD of *Black Swan*, Nina’s childish bedroom is also not audio described, with a loss in the sense of her immaturity, which was important to emphasise at this stage. And in the AD of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, whilst the family’s journey from Berlin to the Polish countryside may be read symbolically to a degree, particularly where Bruno is described as wearing striped pyjamas on the train in an implicit mirroring of the transportation of prisoners, and where the house is described in terms that suggest an unwelcoming and enclosed, prison-like building, there is an error in the description of the final leg of the journey, with a loss of intended connotation:

The car, which has small swastika flags fixed to the front fenders turns a bend. Father, who’s at the wheel, puts on his General’s cap. / In the back seat, his wife wakes the children.

(11:06–11:16)

Contrary to this description, the father is not driving, but being driven in a German staff car, which would be normal for someone of his rank, but in a nonliteral reading of the image, he is shown to have little control over the direction of events in his family’s life; a connotation that cannot be derived from the AD. The glass partition in the car that
separates the General from his wife and children might also have been audio described in emphasis of a barrier between them, although this may have overburdened the AD with detail.

Another misjudgement in the audio description of an allegorical road journey was observed in the AD of *Never Let Me Go*:

> From a driver’s eye view, a car heads down a leafy country lane. There’s a minibus on the road ahead. It splashes through a puddle at the roadside. Raindrops run down the window. Kathy is sitting in the back of the bus.  
> (28:20–28:33)

The driver and car referred to in this description do not exist: it is the camera (and, therefore, the audience) that follows behind the clones on their road trip to Norfolk. The connotational motif of the clones’ isolated journeys in search of meaning in their lives is, therefore, compromised by this AD.

Such losses or incomplete transfer in the AD of important connotational aspects of film environments, although individually minor, do weaken the overall aesthetic and syntagmatic structure of these films, nonetheless.

**Framing**

Framing is a further element of composition with propositional intent in the grouping or separation of forms (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 176) (see section 2.1.2). The framing of subjects in mirrors, doorways and windows, for example, confines them within the time and space of their environments and reflects their psychological states (of entrapment or moving into a new phase in their lives, etc.). This is because the frame is a “metacomment”, implicitly suggesting how to read what is shown within it (Baldry and Thibault, 2005: 10). Harvey’s turning away from his own image framed in the bathroom mirror in *Last Chance Harvey*, for example, might be read as a moment of psychological pain, and, in a wider context, as his being unable to face the truth or face himself in isolation. Additionally, the framing of Benjamin behind a partially-open window in the old folk’s home in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* could be taken as denotative of a warm Southern evening, although is also implicitly connotative of barriers to the outside world being lifted. In fact, the doorways and windows that frame Benjamin throughout this film may be interpreted as thresholds that he is unwilling or unable to cross both physically
or psychologically at different points in his life. Moreover, where framing is not solely a compositional device intended to capture a subject in creative and meaningful ways, but also a physical possibility, in the framing of a character in a doorway or window, for example, this makes the audio description of these surroundings possible in diegetic terms without recourse to technical language.

In the AD of the films analysed, the meaningful framing of characters is sometimes successfully included, although the full intention of imagery is not always captured. For example:

April pulls the door shut behind Helen. She stares out of the glass panel in the door. She wears a pensive expression on her beautiful face. She has a milky complexion and deep blue eyes.

(18:36–18:47)

Whilst this segment of AD from Revolutionay Road adequately conveys the character’s “pensive” contemplation through a window, it only partially offers the target audience the same sense of significance as the original image. The framing of April behind horizontal window slats and the reflection of a neighbouring home in the pane are signs of the housewife’s entrapment in this 1950s suburban environment, yet these are not audio described, to the detriment of the subtle feminist statement that is expressed in the shot.

There are a number of further examples in the film AD data of absent or incomplete transfer of framing effects. The framing of Benjamin behind a partially-open window in The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, for example, is not audio described (as outlined previously), with a loss of thematic connotation in the maturation of his character as he moves towards the outside world. Examples also include the omission of how the radio microphone is used in The King’s Speech to represent the dominance and constriction of physical space, which deeply reflects the Duke of York’s psychological impotence and confinement in the face of public speaking. There is inconsistency also in capturing the framing of Harvey in hallways, mirrors and windows in the AD of Last Chance Harvey, some of which successfully conveys the concept of his being unable to face himself during a problematic phase of his life, where his sideways view in mirrors is included, although with a limited sense of despondency. Again, the psychological constriction of this character, as emphasised in shots in which he is physically confined, are also only partially conveyed in the AD. For example:
AD: Harvey removes the mobile from his ear and stands staring out of the vast glass window at the end of the concourse.

(32:38–32:44)

Although a large window is included in this description, the box shape of the airport concourse in which Harvey finds himself ‘cut off’ (from the phonecall, his job and other people) at the most extreme (‘last’) point of the building, is not. So, the target audience may only partially conceptualise the man’s psychological state on the edge of last chances from the imagery. Similarly, in Up in the Air, the motif of boxed framing in windows and restricted spaces, which visually proposes the social disconnection and psychological pain of the characters at certain times in the narrative, is not fully embraced in the AD; for example, where a metonymic shot of Bingham’s face framed in the portal of a plane emphasises his emotional isolation. At other moments, the framing is successfully conveyed in the film AD, however. For example:

AD: Ryan’s solitary figure is framed by one of a row of tall windows in the nondescript hotel block.

(1:29:57–1:30:01)

This AD not only captures Ryan Bingham’s isolation, but also emphasises it by including his framing in one of many characterless hotel windows; a sign that he is lost in the monotony of his transitory existence.

Similarly, in Never Let Me Go, the audio describer employs different approaches in the tackling of framing, particularly of Ruth, from the plain and simple inclusion of the motif ("Ruth is standing in the doorway" (from 21:27) ), to the complete omission of the signifier ("Ruth comes in" (from 35:25) ), to the more attentive, yet straightforward, transfer of imagery in the context of both framing and lighting ("Ruth is silhouetted in the doorway" (from 49:33) ). Other than for the omission, which weakens the overall linkage of this important motif, the other examples appropriately express the intention of the imagery, naturally and without undue complexity in the timeframes available. And although the latter form exhibits a greater degree of creativity, the imagery is darker and more intense in this scene. There is also no reason why different styles of language cannot be employed in AD to maintain the more covert nature of visual motifs, which would be unduly explicit if stylistic language were reused.

A more abstract, figurative treatment, yet one that intelligently and covertly aligns with the framing motif (if intended), is the ‘broken cross’ shape of a window frame through which
Bruno watches a propaganda film in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. The way in which the frame is angled around his small head seems to momentarily enclose his face within the right angles of a swastika. This fleeting, subliminal suggestion is not audio described, which, in any event would be unduly explicit and complex.

In summary, the way in which subjects are framed is important to the expressive nature of the mise-en-scène, the omission of which from film AD limits the opportunities for target spectators to appreciate mainstream films on a more aesthetic level, exploring themes and character psychology in a similar way to sighted spectators. Again, losses in film AD that cannot be explained by short soundtrack timeframes or overly-obscure visual constructions, can also impair the visually-impaired spectator’s ability to form mental links from the thematic motifs expressed visually.

**Colour and lighting**

As understood from the film theory explored in section 2.1.2, the use of light and colour can provide additional signification to image composition (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 233). In mainstream film, this can be understood by way of association (Berger, 1991: 23) or through the atmosphere created (Bignell, 2002: 193). For example, the black and white contrasting colour scheme throughout *Black Swan*, together with Nina’s transitioning from light to dark clothing as she pulls away from her mother, are suggestive of sexual maturation and connotative of the dichotomy between the black and white swan personae she assumes. As before, the use of colour imagery can also suggest “changes from the real world to the imaginary world” (Chaume, 2004: online), which, in *Black Swan*, might be associated with changes between the ‘real world’ of the ballerina and the imaginary world of *Swan Lake*, as well as between those of the diegetic world and the contrived world of filmmaking. But these contrasts of colour are not audio described. Again, neither are the contrasting light and dark cowboy hats in *Brokeback Mountain* that can be interpreted associatively as the stereotypical garb of the good and bad cowboys of Hollywood westerns, making these signifiers important in the deconstruction of tradition. Moreover, colour in film can be used with diverse “expressive purpose” in different contexts (Leibowitz, 1997: 331–2). The colour motif of the red, white and blue loyalty poster in *Up in the Air*, for example, is a powerful signifier of American brand patriotism, although this is not audio described. In the same film, the passion of the red rose offered to a returning lover as backdrop to the lonely Bingham is also not audio described, but this omission is legitimate due to the simultaneous voiceover narration on the soundtrack. The red of the dress of the deceitful lover in *Casino Royale* is, though, audio described, as is the flashing
red light of the microphone in *The King's Speech*, which dons the instrument with a threatening persona. Similarly, the muted shades in *Last Chance Harvey*, which are used expressively to convey the hero’s feelings of insignificance, are alluded to in the AD, although the muted colour scheme of *Never Let Me Go*, which complements the emotional restraint of the characters, is only partially conveyed in the AD of the titles and intertitles. In contrast, the starkly white interior of Jack’s parents’ ranch house in *Brokeback Mountain*, although vague in meaning, is not alluded to in the AD, with a subsequent loss in opportunity for the target audience to make meanings (in terms of character mentality, for example), and absorb something of the ‘void’ of this colourless environment.

Equally, lighting is often used meaningfully in the films analysed to indicate mood, states and feelings, such as dreams, fantasy, shame, spiritualism, love, good and evil. For example, the oppressive light over the discarded clothing outside the gas chamber at the end of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, is a strong, emotive indicator of the dark event that has taken place, as appropriately included in the AD. By comparison, the obscure light of dawn at the start of *Brokeback Mountain*, also included in the AD, might be read as a metaphor for the awakening of the character who drives into view. However, the light at the end of a dark hospital corridor in *Never Let Me Go*, which gives a sense of Ruth’s ‘moving towards the light’ as she talks of her third organ donation, is not audio described.

The candle between Benjamin and Daisy in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, representative of a bond forming between them, which is extinguished as they are discovered, is also only partially incorporated in the AD:

> Kneeling beneath the table, Benjamin strikes a match and carefully lights a candle whose warm glow silhouettes them behind the white drapery. (33:37–33:44)

The description of the “warm glow” of a candle conveys some sense of unity even though the candle is not noted as being between the friends. Conversely, when the candle goes out, there is a sense of shame, which is missing from this description, although compensated for in some way by the dialogue. Distortions of light and focus can also be used to reflect the distorted psychology of characters, such as the scene in which Benjamin’s father, Thomas, is back-lit while Benjamin stands in the light, which is an indexical sign of shame as the man tells his son the truth about his birth. This effect is included in the AD where Thomas is said to be “half-hidden in shadow”. The inclusion of lighting effects is inconsistent in the AD of the films analysed, however, with, for example,
the dark, distorted shots of Bertie at the beginning of The King’s Speech, indicative of the character’s crippling fear at the thought of public speech, not indicated in any way.

In short, colour and lighting afford important physical and psychological contrasts in the environments of mainstream films, proposing diverse interpretations in different contexts. But although colours and the effects of light are often included in the AD, this is inconsistent, with many cases of incomplete transfer or missing signifiers observed.

Objects

In the qualitative data analysis, it has been further observed that visual signification can be made meaningful through the intentional features of characters, clothing, gestures, props, vehicles, and so on. As detailed in section 2.1.2, “objects” in films, which can be said to include the characters, can be used in non-literal ways to relate diverse cultural meanings (Metz, 1974: 113). Examples of the significant paradigmatic usage of objects observed in the 10 films analysed range from culturally familiar signifiers, such as flags, uniforms and emblems, to more abstract, yet definable forms. The flag at half-mast included in the AD of The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, for example, is a recognisable mark of respect for the deceased. Additionally, the uniform with death-head insignia worn by the Commandant in The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, which is a dress ‘code’ that helps the audience affiliate this character with the SS, is included in the AD, also notably during a conversation with his son about the prisoners’ clothing, which contrasts with his uniform. Further, the contrasting clothing of Frank’s suit and April’s apron in Revolutionary Road, set in Fifties’ America, are suggestive of the traditional male/female roles of the period and successfully audio described. Recognised roles and stereotypes can suggest moral, ideological or psychological states and motivations so play an important part in visual connotation in these films. As Danesi states: “The signs in a dress code are the items of clothing that can be worn in different combinations to send out certain kinds of socially meaningful messages” (1999: 5). In a similar way, affiliations might be implied from the signifying marks of tattoos (Danesi, 1999: 58–59; Cirlot, 2001: location 7299 of 9304). The Captain’s hummingbird tattoo in The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, for example, affiliates this character thematically with the concept of infinity, by way of the symbolic figure-of-eight shape of the hummingbird’s wing movements (as discussed in the dialogue without the need for AD). The tattoo of black lilies in Black Swan also ‘types’ Lily as a character with a solid sense of who she is, in contrast to the naivety of Nina, and resembles black wings in connotation of her
contrasting black swan persona. In the audio description, however, the formal transfer of
lilies is avoided:

Nina picks up her things. Lily has an elaborate tattoo like wings on
her upper back. Nina bumps into her as she walks out. (14:28–14:34)

Although the lilies could be said to resemble wings, so the simile in the AD makes the
shape of the tattoo clear, there is no mention of the black lilies in this description, so the
target audience will be unable to infer further meanings or connections (also where the
caracter’s name is Lily).

As previously mentioned under section 4.3.1, the films analysed also feature many objects
pertaining to genre that might be read on a connotative level (the cars in Casino Royale,
for example, which reflect character image, and the clock running backwards in The
Curious Case of Benjamin Button, which is a metaphor for Benjamin’s rejuvenation and
the clockmaker’s nostalgia, each of which are audio described in the course of the action).
Other prop functions are thematic; Gretel’s much loved dolls in The Boy in the Striped
Pyjamas, for example, which are later found stacked in the cellar as an horrific metaphor
in the film’s contexts for the Holocaust and Bruno’s impending death. This discovery is
audio described as “hundreds of undressed children’s dolls piled up several feet high”,
which appropriately conveys the dark imagery. Further, the discarded jumble traded at the
school Sales in Never Let Me Go, which is a thematic representation of the children’s low
social status as clones, and, more poignantly, of their dispensability in the national organ
donor programme, is appropriately audio described as damaged “tat and rubbish”, leaving
the target audience to make further connections as the narrative develops. Other
examples of thematic object function include Bingham’s many loyalty cards in Up in the
Air, a reminder of misplaced loyalties, which feature in the dialogue of a number of
scenes, as complemented by the AD. Also, the radio microphone in The King’s Speech,
dominates the screen as an indexical sign of the main protagonist’s fear of public speech,
although the effect is not carried over in the AD of the action. The AD in this period drama
is, however, infused with many description of objects, décor and vehicles predating WWII,
which adds authenticity to the piece, and there are many images of bi-planes audio
described in support of the dialogue. The bi-plane motif also provides an autobiographical
link to the director, whose grandfather was a pilot killed in action in WWII), although where
a dedication is made to this man in the end credits, this is notably absent from the AD.
In a similar way, object function can also be intertextual, linking with antecedent events and literary material. For example, the caressing of items of clothing at the end of *Brokeback Mountain*, which is audio described (although not contrasted in the AD with the otherwise untidy environment), could be considered an intertextual reference to similar action in John Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956) (Stafford, 2007: 93). On a more abstract plane of connotation, is the intertextual link in *Black Swan*, which, through the concept of cloning, links actors across other roles they have played (Natalie Portman, for example, in the leading role of this film and in Lucas’ *Attack of the Clones* (2002)). This pun is obscure, however, and may be unintentional, although the notion of ‘cloning’ in *Black Swan* is tangible in the repetition of imagery, including mirrors and identical posters, none of which is audio described, and the large ‘androgyous’ sculpture, *Future Clone*, which is misleadingly described as “a man”. Books are another prop that can hold connotational significance through intertextuality. The use of *Ivanhoe* (Scott, 1819) in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, for example, might be interpreted as a pun, being the name of the town in which one of the leading actors, Cate Blanchett, lived as a child (IMDB: online), or intertextually through the representation of paternal abandonment in each of these stories. By including the title of Benjamin’s book in the AD, the audio describer has simply and successfully created an equivalence that affords the audience a chance to derive further significance from the link. Contrastively, the book *A Wayward Note* in *Last Chance Harvey*, is a fictitious novel, although the title may be interpreted as a pun, being the name of the musician’s disorganised life, which links him to the woman reading it. As before, the term ‘intertextual’ commonly denotes the use of antecedent material (Berger, 1991: 20), of which the reading of intertextual signifiers might normally require knowledge. This should in no way inhibit the inclusion of more ‘specialist’ visual signifiers in the AD, where identified and understood by the audio describer, however, since target users will still be able to read these denotatively without knowledge of the other material.

Inconsistency in the inclusion of object signifiers that are intended to convey subliminal messages has also been observed in respect of brand name products. Brands are often included in mainstream films with the intention of advertising sponsors to whom production companies may have contractual obligations. Such product placement, the signs of advertising, can be indexical of a film’s funding and the lifestyles that brands seek to promote to audiences. According to Jung, trademarks are symbols, which advertisers want consumers to associate with cool or enjoyable moments to ‘unconsciously’ “trigger” the same good feelings about the brand and products (1964: 36). Chandler also observes that advertisers differentiate by associating their products with “a specific set of social values— in semiotic terms, creating distinct signifieds” (2007: 128). These signifiers are,
therefore, carefully positioned in mainstream films and often used by the main characters, but despite this, there are numerous instances in the films analysed where they do not feature at all in the AD. These include the Philips brand in The King’s Speech (although Bovril is included); Sony equipment used by both the heroes and adversaries in Casino Royale, along with Smirnoff, Heineken, and Virgin at Miami Airport (although Sony Ericsson, Spirit, Ford, Range Rover and Aston Martin are included); and Swarovski in Black Swan. Contrastively, Hilton and American Airlines, which are an integral part of the storyline in Up in the Air and feature in the dialogue, appear to have been more naturally incorporated in the AD, since a preoccupation with brand loyalty is a major concern of the narrative. Overall, however, there appears to be some reluctance in AD to include signs of advertising that are irrelevant to character image and plots, so these signifiers are not prioritised, particularly if they are not well-known by UK consumers (Greening, 2013: personal communication). However, products denoting a particular period in time, or that bestow connotational qualities on the characters, such as cars (as indicative of the driver’s personality (Greening, 2013: personal communication) ), are often audio described.

In summary, the inclusion of objects in the AD of the films analysed contributes to the iconic representation of diverse realities and eras in different genres. Additionally, the description of objects of connotational significance can enable the target audience to form impressions concerning the nature of characters and derive thematic understandings from the contexts in which they are expressed. Subsequently, a loss of object signifiers in film AD may limit the depth to which film works can be explored on such bases as the emotional, cultural, intellectual, aesthetic and intertextual, by the target audience.

Motif

In the composition of films, stylistic repetition can be used to create thematic ‘motif’ (Phillips, 2000: 36). Motif is commonly found in the syntagmatic structures of mainstream films and has been widely observed in the 10 films analysed. These include the diminishing views of mountain landscape in Brokeback Mountain; recurrent action along roads, pathways and corridors in Never Let Me Go; colours and shapes reminiscent of the Nazi flag and the striped clothing and views of characters through ‘bars’ in The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas; the clocks and hummingbirds in The Curious Case of Benjamin Button; the bi-planes, radio microphone and conversations across thresholds in The King’s Speech; the reflections of suburban homes in mirrors and windows in Revolutionary Road; the ‘loyalty’ poster in Up in the Air; mirrors and black and white sets in Black Swan; reflections of Harvey in polished piano surfaces, mirrors and windows in Last Chance
Harvey; and the skeletal forms, and impaired left field of vision of Bond’s adversaries in *Casino Royale*, which are inconsistently audio described across all of the films studied.

Framing in doors, windows and mirrors, cross formations and vertical and diagonal lines can be particularly emphatic and have been commonly observed in the creation of motifs that convey psychological or spiritual messages or that point towards obvious or more abstract truths. For example, the symmetrical barriers formed by a bunk bed ladder and balusters in front of Bruno in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (not audio described), together with the vertical lines of his striped pyjamas (included in the AD), produce an allegorical motif through the mirroring of Bruno and Shmuel, the child in striped uniform at the death camp, expressing their sameness and foreboding the same outcome for the boys. In *Brokeback Mountain*, the motif of traditional belief, which forms an undercurrent of prejudice and stereotypes in the film, is conveyed through such imagery as the dark cross-shaped telegraph poles in the opening sequence (audio described as crosses against the landscape), together with the dark wooden cross emphasised against the white surroundings in Jack’s parental home (not audio described), the dark and light cowboy hats of the main protagonists (only partially conveyed in the AD), and the ‘trespassers will be shot’ sign on the foreman’s office (excluded from the AD). In *Never Let Me Go*, the framing of Ruth in doorways and windows (inconsistently audio described), and her positioning in one scene at the end of a vector created by the diagonal of a staircase that separates her boyfriend from Kathy (an impression that does not come across in the AD), endows her presence with ominous undertones. Such strong, emphatic usage proposes important and diverse signification through the repetition of concepts in the syntagmatic structure of these films and the textual ‘linkage’ of themes, although this is inconsistently transferred in the AD.

Further examples of imagery omitted from the AD include the red wall panel in the white hallway and nature of the Nazi magazines in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*; the extinguished candle between the secret friends, and Benjamin’s partially-open window in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*; the different views of the radio microphone, the framing in doorways and the corner of the screen, and the dedication to the director’s grandfather in *The King’s Speech*; the ‘bars’ across the housewife’s face in *Revolutionary Road*; the articles of human reproduction in the biology class, Ruth’s expression as she watches Tommy and Kathy together, and the repeated hospital windows in deep perspective in *Never Let Me Go*; the reflections and framing in pianos and windows, and Harvey’s closing of a taxi door as Kate enters from the other side in *Last Chance Harvey*; and some of the skeletal shapes in *Casino Royale*. The description of moles as “three
dark marks" on Jack’s face in *Brokeback Mountain* are also misleadingly positioned in the AD as signifiers, being inappropriately implicit in the context. To exclude figurative imagery in AV translation, where relevant to the significance of a scene or to the linkage of themes in the narrative, is to detract from the intent of the original material.

The mise-en-scène, or composition, of a scene: the environment, organisation of space, framing, use of colour, lighting, characters, props, motif, and so on, constitutes a correlation of visual messages readable on multiple levels. Whilst many examples of the successful inclusion of such semiotic constructions were observed in the film AD analysed, which proposes opportunities for target spectators to conceptualise imagery in a certain way and form secondary levels of meaning, a number of inconsistencies were also observed, including the omission or incomplete transfer of important connotative signifiers across all of the films explored. It has also been observed that this is rarely the result of limited soundtrack time, but more commonly due to the prioritisation of less significant events; an indication, perhaps that the expressive nature of some imagery is not always perceived by audio describers.

### 4.3.3. Camera techniques

Within the cinematic space, the camera follows and observes its subjects at various distances, angles, degrees of focus, in reverse action, and slow motion, etc., or can show the world from the subjective point of view of the characters (Kawin, 1978: 7), as outlined in section 2.1.2. The various ways in which the camera engages its subjects can create meaningful visual expressions (Leibowitz, 1997: 330), examples of which have been observed in all of the mainstream films analysed. In the prologue of *Casino Royale*, for example, the double-agent, Dryden, is introduced to the audience in black and white, foregrounded against an institutional building in an oblique, low-angled shot that destabilises the image and elicits a feeling of alienation reminiscent of espionage films of the Cold War period (*The Ipcress File* (Furie, 1965), for example). Camera angle suggests a feeling towards subjects (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 129), and, in this case, Dryden is expressly conveyed in an unstable or untrustworthy position, for which no language solution is found in the AD. In *Black Swan*, the angle of the shot that reflects Nina and Lily in a panelled mirror, positioning them to appear as one person (where the reflection of Nina’s face and front, and the back of Lily’s body are adjacent), creatively expresses Nina’s affinity with the darker character, although this effect is not conveyed in the AD. Additionally, low- and high-angled shots can be connotative of a character’s status (Berger, 1991: 27), with, for example, the long shot angled upwards to Bruno behind the
balusters of a staircase in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, making him appear small and trapped, which is excluded from the AD.

As before, a close-up or long-shot can also be used significantly to connote “personal” or “impersonal” distance, respectively (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996 and Tuchman 1978, referenced by Chandler 2007: 193). The zoom into a subject’s face, for example, suggests “intimacy” (Berger, 1991: 26) or emotional state, which can be clearly observed in *The King’s Speech* in the distorted close ups of Bertie’s face through the frame of the radio microphone before he addresses the public (not audio described). The camera’s zooming out from the gas chamber door at the end of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, as if backing away from the horror, is also a poignant visual metaphor as the screen fades to black, indicative of the ending of life and the story (as appropriately conveyed in the AD). In *Up in the Air*, the distant shots of Bingham framed in hotel windows and in the portal of a plane towards the end of the film, are indexical of the impersonal and isolated nature of his transitory lifestyle (inconsistently audio described). Tracking shots can also establish context (Berger, 1991: 26), and in *Never Let Me Go*, the camera frequently tracks behind its subjects creating an analogy between their physical progress and their life’s forward journey in time (again, inconsistently described). Even the static camera can be used to significant effect. In the corridor scene near the beginning of *Revolutionary Road*, for example, the camera is unmoving as the disagreeing couple moves slowly towards it, presenting a long opportunity for the audience to interpret the scene, such as how the couple moves forward in life, with April positioned behind Frank in a bland environment, as well as expressing the decreasing distance between the smouldering argument and the full force of their emotions (only partially conveyed in the AD). The perceptions of the characters can also be observed through the camera’s focus. The point-of-view reflection of Ennis in the wing mirror of Jack’s pick-up truck in *Brokeback Mountain*, for example, expresses Jack’s interest in this man (only partially conveyed in the AD).

Finally, temporal camera effects, such as slow and fast motion capture and reverse action, can be used with expressive purpose. In *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, for example, the forward-reverse action flashback to the death of the clockmaker’s son in a WWI explosion (audio described), provides an indexical association between time and events, expressing loss, regret and a longing for a previous state. Conversely, the fast-forward sequence in the dress shop scene in *Last Chance Harvey*, produces a humorous slap-stick effect that expresses the inappropriateness of the dresses tried on, in reminiscence of such scenes in other romantic comedies, although the fast motion capture is not transferred in the AD. In a relevant, traditional notion of translation: “The
temporal factors of a narrative are often highly important in the discourse structure” (Nida, 1964: 212), but it has been observed that this is not always included in respect of fast forward and slow motion capture in film AD, although flashbacks are usually described since these constitute diegetic action rather than emphatic technical effects.

The expressive use of camera plays an important part in sign construction by creating emphasis and making subliminal suggestions to the audience. Were the same visual messages to be proposed to visually-impaired audiences in audio description, a more equitable experience would be possible. But in terms of camera technique overall, the method of description is usually to omit this rather than to include technical or specialist language (such as that explored by Fryer (2010) in the dense, technical audio description of cinematography in Lean’s Brief Encounter (1945) (see section 3.1) ). So, although language is sometimes found in film AD to convey character viewpoint or positioning, the methods of expressing camera focus and movement in straightforward diegetic terms are currently limited, which directly affects the perception of imagery by target users.

4.3.4. Montage

Editing provides the illusion of continuity in the diegesis of mainstream films, with montage editing the aesthetically significant piecing together of events by way of association (Mitry, 2000: 68). As previously, the linking of events helps audiences to make “mental connections” and creates dramatic tension (Phillips, 2000: 43). This can be used to make figurative suggestions, for instance in the syntagmatic ‘collision’ of juxtaposed images (Hayward, 2000: 94–97) from which the cinematic metaphor can result or something other than what is shown can be suggested (Mitry, 2000: 69), or from changes in temporality, such as flashback (as discussed in section 2.1.2). The grainy flashbacks included in the AD of The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, for example, provide an indexical link between past events and the present, which supports the film’s themes concerning time and memory. Moreover, cross-cutting to parallel action in other parts of the diegetic world can propose connotational associations. For example, when multiple images of the radio microphone at the beginning of The King’s Speech are interspersed with blurred and restrictive images of the Duke and shots of the confident preparations of the BBC announcer, a comparison is made that emphasises the Duke’s anxiety as a result of public speaking, although this is not transferred in the AD. In Revolutionary Road also, the long sequence of Frank’s busy journey to work, which cross-cuts to April, motionless in her apron in the family’s suburban home, strongly distinguishes their gender roles and connotes the housewife’s lack of freedom (although in the choreographed shots of the
myriad other men making their way through the station, the irony of Frank’s social conformity is also confirmed). The contrasting gender roles and environments are conveyed in the AD of the action at different locations in this sequence (although the sense of conformity in the uniform flow of the men going to work is only partially captured in the AD). In the opening of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, the montage of multiple cross-cut images: the boy playing aeroplanes with his friends, people in ghettos being herded into trucks, the inside of an opulent home, and a woman being helped from a car by a chauffeur, are further connotational of difference and divisions in status, which are appropriate included in the AD of the action. In *Last Chance Harvey*, the cross-cutting between Harvey and Kate’s evenings out in London, as included in the AD, also creates a comparison between their relationship failures and unhappiness, although the marginalisation of these characters at their respective locations is not fully realised in the AD.

The editing together of images from sequential scenes can also be accentuated through the use of ‘optical’ devices, such as dissolves and fade-outs (Monaco, 2009: location 2168 of 14542). The fading-out from an image can signify the end of a scene or a film (Berger, 1991: 27), such as at the end of *Brokeback Mountain*, which follows the closing of a door on the lovers’ intertwined shirts and the postcard image of the mountain. In this case, more than the end of the film is connoted, but also the end of a dramatic love story, although the fade-out is not audio described. Alternatively, in *Casino Royale*, the fade to black from Le Chiffre with a bullet through the forehead emphasises the end of this villain, and where the following images are of Bond opening his eyes, the important distinction is made that the hero is still alive (although in the absence of a description of the bullet hole like a third ‘eye’ in Le Chiffre’s forehead, there is no link to the close-up of Bond opening his eyes that is subsequently audio described). A dissolve can also be used to create metaphorical association through the merging of two distinct images, with one fading out as the other is brought in. In *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, the fade-out from the Commandant in SS uniform to the stone eagle at the gates of the house, is an example of subtle juxtaposition, which proposes a comparison between the soldier and the regime, as represented in the symbolism of the eagle, although this fleeting effect of montage is not incorporated in the AD. According to Eco, a metaphor might be considered “weak” when “the amount of new knowledge provided is disappointing” (1979: 83), as in this case, wherein the transfer of connotation is limited. This might also be said to be the case in respect of omission and inaccuracies concerning iconic usage in film AD.
The montage of images is an integral aspect of mainstream film construction, important to the spectator's building of meaning through comparison and contrast. The signification of the suggestive, sometimes metaphorical constructions proposed, which can be visually fleeting or abstract, is made more obvious through the concrete realities of narrative context. Montage is, therefore, essential to the cohesive understanding of the action in AD, as well as offering visually-impaired spectators the chance to derive meaning from creative form, although this is inconsistently audio described.

4.3.5. Music and sounds

As discussed in section 2.1.2, the “aural signifiers” of film music and sound effects (Bignell, 2002: 193) are often used to heighten mood (Baldry and Thibault, 2005: 51) and accentuate the intention of imagery. The ominous music and distortion of sound during the subway scene in Black Swan, for example, signals the presence of menace as Nina regards her reflection and becomes aware of a passenger mirroring her gestures (the meaning of which is successfully anchored in the AD of the action). The expressiveness of music can also indicate character emotion (Bignell, 2002: 194) or arouse emotions in the listener (Danesi, 1999: 171). The soft orchestral music heard during the scene in which Ennis tearfully surveys his lover’s childhood bedroom in Brokeback Mountain, is an example of how music complements character emotion, seeking emotive response from the audience (although this is not supported in the AD of this scene). Conversely, the light-hearted musical interlude during Harvey and Kate’s romantic walk past the historical sites of London in Last Chance Harvey, is strongly connotative of a lift in mood, which is complemented by the AD of the sites. Extra diegetic sound can also create thematic motif. The sinister music, clock ticking and wind blowing sound effects in Never Let Me Go, for example, form a structuring link in the film, expressing the unnerving connotation of emptiness and time running out in a covert and existentialist reference to the brevity of life for the clones and in general. A musical motif can also have connotational links with the characters (Metz, 1974: 110); the classic ‘Bond’ signature tune in Casino Royale being a prime example of how music signifiers can signal the appearance or action of an important situation or protagonist, although which would require AD to understand events in more detail.

As previously stated, the expressive nature of music and sounds may have implications for film AD where sound signifiers are self-explanatory (emotive music, for example). However, music is often difficult to define (Barthes, 1977: 179) and the interpretation of sounds without images can also be challenging. So, although Smith believes that film
music is “so highly codified and conventionalized” that it engenders understanding (1996: 236–237) (as discussed in section 2.1.2 and 2.1.3), it must also be accepted that audience interpretation is difficult without the anchoring of meaning in visual contexts. The upbeat orchestral music at the beginning of The King’s Speech, for example, in no way divulges the Duke’s apprehension of public speaking. Such signifiers of music and sound in mainstream films, like dialogue, are, therefore, only partial, being reliant upon image contexts to stabilise their significance. AD is, therefore, helpful during musical interludes and where soundtrack meaning is loose or obscure. For example, the change to sinister music at the school Sales in Never Let Me Go, which is clarified by the AD of broken junk on the tables, and the ominous music in Casino Royale, which is accompanied by a dark description of Le Chiffre. The musical motif of the ‘Bond’ theme also, which is recognisable as a moment of ‘Bond action’ and commonly heard during a chase, does not fully convey events to the visually-impaired audience without AD. It was additionally observed that audio describers also sometimes allow users a moment to reflect upon what has occurred while the soundtrack plays, such as in the final scene of The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas where an assimilation of events and emotional reaction are encouraged by a telling pause in the AD before the scene is said to fade out.

4.4. Conclusion

Taken together, the data gathered from the qualitative, descriptive analyses in section 4.2, clearly shows that semiotic construction is an inherent feature of mainstream films and is largely based on standard techniques and common cultural associations, despite the individual creativity of filmmakers. The classification of imagery under the common general headings of film construction: genre, mise-en-scène, camera techniques and montage, together with comments on music and sounds, is, therefore, useful in the organisation of imagery for analysis in film AD, although it is accepted that mise-en-scène is an extensive category whose paradigmatic features must be subcategorised for patterns to be more easily appreciated (proposed in this research as environment, framing, colour and light, objects and motif). Within this classification of visual signifiers, different constructions with potential for cultural meaning (flags, emblems, colours, bird imagery and religious iconography, for example); thematic meaning (environments, effects of lighting, framing, motif, and so on); and intertextual meaning (reference to or the mirroring of other works), layer mainstream films with important secondary significance that extends far beyond the basic story. These constructions communicate, first and foremost, denotatively, however, which allows them to be absorbed in the context of the story, although through stylistic invention and emphatic treatment, more figurative
propositions can be made (Barthes, 1977: 56). In fact, within a connotational reading of a narrative, new ‘stories’ can begin to emerge, which support the main story thematically (foreshadowing events, for example) whilst engendering thought in wider personal and social dimensions. Such propositions are not usually expressed explicitly in the character dialogue, but more subtly through visual imagery, which can be processed and assimilated gradually and often subconsciously during viewing.

Ultimately, the qualitative analysis found that, whilst the film AD often conveyed the events of ‘first level story’, the level of success in incorporating connotational signifiers is inconsistent and, where included, such semiotic content is not always articulated in equivalent terms. Of course, loss and gain is to be expected in any translation (Eco, 2003: 32–61), but the regular omission of semiotic content, or inaccuracies and explicitation in transfer, could be considered a deviation from the original product that creates an inequitable viewing experience. As has been observed, film narrative comprises a great deal more than “first level story” (Eco, 1979: 28), and, again, “a narrative is not merely to move from one word to the next, it is also to move from one level to the next” (Barthes, 1977: 87). In the same way, this qualitative analysis suggests that equivalents should be found in film AD if a fuller experience of film is to be made accessible to the visually-impaired user. In the context of AD, soundtrack space is restricted, so the generation of semantic equivalents for visual imagery needs also to be balanced with the need to prioritise the basic elements of a story for a cohesive and meaningful tale. The transmutation of visual signifiers that additionally allows scope for the inclusion of expression as intended by filmmakers need not be complex, as many of the preceding examples suggest. However, this requires an adequate judgement of the imagery and its appropriate prioritisation and transfer on the part of audio describers.

In view of the semiotic features identified in the films analysed, it appears possible to convey equivalent elements in the AD with verbal economy, which can be achieved through the inclusion of, for example, colour schemes and lighting contrasts; reference to particular objects, such as lighted candles and books; action along the enclosed spaces of corridors, pathways and roads; framing in mirrors, windows and doorways; cultural symbols, such as flags at half-mast and animal imagery; together with ‘states’, such as reverse action and contrasting weather conditions. Many of these elements would not necessarily be included in the telling of a story, although it is accepted that in the general description of characters, locations and action, a degree of connotation will be proposed by default (the road journey, for example, which can be interpreted metaphorically in some contexts). Where signifiers are more widely included in film AD, the target audience will be
afforded many more opportunities to experience films on a non-literal level, as resulting from wider propositional meanings. The greater cognitive activity in the conceptualisation of imagery, resulting knowledge and appreciation of themes and culture, together with the more equitable inclusion of visually-impaired spectators in mainstream film viewing, highlight the value of connotational imagery in film AD, as responds to research question 3. In complement of this, the question of value is also more directly addressed in the following chapter in a qualitative analysis of spectator response to semiotic content, with a more detailed discussion of the value of visual imagery in section 5.3.
5. AD testing and semi-structured interviews

Semiosis is a “ceaseless” process (Kress, 2003: 44) in which the conceptualisation of imagery can lead to further values for interpretation. Meanings are established along the ongoing chain of signifiers as we make sense of them, understanding patterns and forming links within the coded systems we use to communicate. Mainstream film imagery is, thus, open to individual interpretation, although signification can also be understood by the collective, being largely shaped by culture, context and the conventions of filmmaking, each of which has its parameters. The sense that can be made from the sign forms in popular films and, in turn, their audio description, is, therefore, expected to be equivalent between people of the same culture in many instances. With this in mind, two methodological exercises were formulated to explore the value of mainstream film imagery from sighted and VI perspectives, whilst testing the hypothesis that equitable understanding is possible between these different user groups. These studies involved the testing of original AD extracts against adjusted versions of these texts, together with the semi-structured interviewing of the same research subjects to gain an understanding of preferences and image comprehension in film viewing. These small complementary studies, in addition to the qualitative film and AD content analysis of chapter 4, aimed to more directly respond to research question 3 concerning the value of visual imagery in film AD for users. The observations formed as a result of the AD testing exercise and semi-structured interviews are laid out in sections 5.1 and 5.2, respectively, with value discussed in more detail in section 5.3. Thus, central to the qualitative analyses in this chapter, is the determination of whether signs are adequately expressed in AD so as to present target users with similar processing opportunities to those available to sighted spectators.

5.1. Results from the testing of different AD versions

As outlined in methodology section 3.4.2., the second stage of qualitative research was a small complementary study designed to produce primary data in respect of meanings that might be derived from the visual signifiers of film so as to determine the value of semiotic content in film AD. This involved the testing of brief extracts of audio taken from 4 of the audio described films analysed previously in section 4.2 (Black Swan, The King’s Speech, Brokeback Mountain split into two parts, and The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas) against the same clips with adjustments to the AD to include more semiotic content. As detailed previously, these clips were selected for their varied content, being from different directors and audio describers, and also due to the ‘under translation’ of a number of forms with the
potential for connotative significance in the original AD. In adjusting these AD texts, formal equivalences were found for the original imagery, which meant the retention of source content and messages. The participants who took part in this study included 5 visually-impaired people and a control group of 5 sighted people (also enlisted to increase the sample size) of different ages, gender and backgrounds, and, in respect of the VI participants, of both early and later ages of onset of their individual sight conditions. It was first important to set a baseline from which to appreciate the difference AD can make by testing the original audio without AD. Viewing norms could also be appreciated by playing the full AV clips to the sighted participants at the end. The main body of results were then classified in terms of the comparisons that could be made between the participants’ understandings of the original and adjusted versions of audio described film, as well as between the responses of the visually-impaired participants and those of the sighted control group.

5.1.1. Response to film audio without AD

In a test of this nature, it is important to understand the difference that audio description can make to the comprehension of mainstream films by AD users. To this end, the audio clips were initially tested without AD, with only the dialogue, music and sounds available to support storylines and imagery. During this part of the test, all of the subjects were generally able to distinguish between diegetic and extra diegetic sounds. Where music and sounds provided subtle indications of mood or changes in location, both the visually-impaired and sighted participants were also able to discern these to a certain extent. However, in the absence of AD, a number of the participants associated some of the sounds with other things, so there was little consistency in the signifieds assigned to these signifiers. For example, 1 sighted participant thought the music from Black Swan to be “eerie” and that the word “pink” in the dialogue referred to girls’ dresses, whereas another derived “melancholy” and “ambition” from the audio, and a third, who had actually seen the film, believed the clip to be of someone walking in a park talking to a man. Another sighted participant found the music to be “dream-like” without AD and heard an “unpleasant” sound effect overlaid when one of the characters asked “What’s that?”. Only 1 of the sighted subjects, who had not seen the film, understood a great deal without AD (the emergence from a dream and a breakfast, for example) and was able to discern who the characters were, feeling also that the music was building up to something. Of the visually-impaired participants, 1 thought he heard keys at the beginning of the clip and a voice-over narration; another thought the atmosphere to be “a bit sad”; 1 thought the music “romantic”; another that it was ‘scene-setting’ and reflective of what was going on in
the girl’s head, although he also picked up on the sound of birds that were not there and thought the action to be outside. Another thought that the girl and her mother were on a train and assumed the girl to be thin because she was a ballerina.

The same partial comprehension, together with numerous misconceptions, occurred in the responses to the other clips. For example, a number of the participants, both sighted and visually-impaired, picked up the sound of a bus (as opposed to an articulated lorry) at the beginning of Brokeback Mountain, and although it was commonly understood that the action was outdoors, 1 VI participant assumed from the film’s title that people were climbing. From the music, 1 VI and 1 sighted participant guessed that they were watching a western, and from the twang of the music and whistling wind, 1 sighted participant imagined a lonely desert landscape, whilst 1 VI participant visualises long perspectives and outside “vistas”. From the final scene of this film, 1 sighted participant felt the music to be more atmospheric, although thought the shuffling of feet denoted a barn dance. Other participants, both sighted and visually-impaired felt the music to be either building, ‘conclusive’ or ‘resolving’, whilst others thought it “jolly” or “unhappy”. Without AD, only 1 sighted participant imagined the character to be looking at a photo as he mumbled something to himself.

Moreover, the music in the clip from The King’s Speech was considered ‘period’ or “stately” by some, whilst 1 VI participant thought it “happy”, another (sighted) imagined a chaotic “Upstairs, Downstairs” situation with numerous servants, and another (sighted) thought she heard a child playing. One VI participant found the music to be quite “British Film Institute”, whilst another picked up nothing at all. The sound effect of the mouth spray was like a drill to 2 of the visually-impaired participants, and 3 VI subjects assumed that the BBC announcer’s vocal exercises were the main character’s stuttering.

From The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, 1 sighted subject falsely heard seagulls and a ball game, finding the music “overpowering”; another thought the scene was at the seaside; and another believed he heard a baby crying. Only 1 subject (sighted) sensed a change from pleasant music with birds tweeting to something more “ominous” with the sound of crows and the echo of footsteps. Of the VI subjects, 1 heard a spanner being dropped or a sword being drawn, but picked up on birdsong and, from that, inferred trees; 1 found the music “bland” and tried to infer what was happening from his knowledge of the story; another picked up the sound of birds and had a general impression that there were rich people present; 1 erroneously heard rain, but correctly heard a creaky gate, as did
another who considered this an “ominous” sign. Two participants, sighted and visually-impaired, also associated the echo of footsteps with a large house.

What can be determined from the diversity of the above responses is that the signifiers of dialogue, music and sounds, whilst sometimes interpretable, are often insufficient and unreliable without the anchoring effect of the imagery (original or audio described). In fact, the varied interpretations of film music might be explained by its lack of “absolute conditioning centre of reference”, which causes listeners to form their own associations (Eco, 1979: 61). This enforces the potential of AD texts to create cohesive links between auditory signifiers as the first stage in the conceptualisation of wider imagery, the value of which is now explored in terms of semiotic construction.

5.1.2. A comparison of the original and adjusted AD versions

When the AD tracks were enabled, the participants were better able to conceptualise the locations and actions of the characters from all of the audio clips. However, in terms of semiotic content, the responses to the original AD, when compared to the clips with additional signifiers (of genre, mise-en-scène, camera techniques and montage), produced some interesting variations (see appendix 1 for the full AD transcripts and adjustments made to each film clip).

First of all, the adjustments that were made to the AD of Black Swan (03:20–04:56) included the addition of colour contrasts, mirror imagery and the suggestion of the young female character’s immaturity and bird-like mannerisms. For example:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03:20</td>
<td>03:30</td>
<td>The young, dark-haired ballerina is asleep in bed. Light falls on her as</td>
<td>The young, brown-haired ballerina lies awake under a pretty pink duvet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the bedroom door opens. She smiles happily and sits up, looking out at</td>
<td>Light falls on her as the bedroom door opens. She smiles in that direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the room.</td>
<td>and sits up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03:39</td>
<td>03:45</td>
<td>In the living room, she stretches out hands and one foot on the floor,</td>
<td>In the living room, she stretches in front of three full-length mirrors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the other straight up in the air. She sits and manipulates her ankle.</td>
<td>A figure in black passes behind her. She sits and manipulates her ankle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04:30</td>
<td>04:33</td>
<td>The young dancer smiles to thank her mother for the compliment.</td>
<td>The dancer, perched bird-like on a stool, smiles at her mother who's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dressed in black with her hair in a bun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04:39</td>
<td>04:41</td>
<td>There's a red mark on the girl's back.</td>
<td>The girl looks in the mirror at a red mark on her back.</td>
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</table>

Of the connotative imagery that appeared in the original AD and was unadjusted in the amended text, the “half a grapefruit and a poached egg” (indicative of the dancer’s strict
regime), was only directly referred to by 1 of the 10 subjects (VI), with 1 other (sighted) only remarking on this after seeing the full AV clip at the end. However, 4 of the 10 subjects (2 sighted and 2 VI) referred to the mark on the ballerina’s back (an early clue to the girl’s transformation, which also links with the bird motif in the syntagmatic structure of the film), 1 of whom said this must be significant for the simple fact that it was included in the AD. In terms of adjustments, the signifier of the mother’s “penetrating dark eyes” (paradigmatically indexical of a darker, more intense nature) was not directly referred to by any of the participants receiving the original AD, although 1 subject (sighted) commented on this from the adjusted version, in which the form was emphasised. Of the 5 participants who received the adjusted AD with additional imagery, 1 subject (sighted) commented on the childishness of the girl’s pink bedroom (imagined to be white from the original AD by 1 (sighted) subject). Three subjects (1 VI and 2 sighted) also commented on the mirrors, with 1 other (sighted), although not directly referring to the mirrors, picturing a dance studio. One of these participants (sighted) also said that the triple mirror “stood out” in the AD. And 1 (sighted) participant imagined the girl to be “self-centred or insecure” from her looking in the mirror and discussed what this might signify, “self-questioning”, for example, also picking up on the “idea of some sort of cloning” from the merging of the mother and daughter’s identities, and in the absence of a father figure. This subject also felt there to be an issue of the mother refusing to let her daughter grow up, with 1 other subject (sighted) finding the mother to be “controlling”. Of the visually-impaired subjects who received the adjusted AD, 1 (congenitally blind) picked up on the motif of the mother’s black attire and that she passes behind the girl stretching in front of three full-length mirrors. This subject additionally commented on the mirror that the girl uses to look at the red mark on her back, although was puzzled by the ‘contortion’ of looking at one’s own back in a mirror, which may be attributed to the subject’s never having experienced this personally. Other than for this complexity in conceptualising a reverse, mirrored shot, the value of the connotational imagery in the adjusted AD audio could, therefore, be summarised in terms of the additional knowledge proposed, creating opportunities for first impressions to be formed from colour and mirror motifs and in respect of character personalities.

The second film clip was split into two parts (00:34–01:00 / 2:01:31–2:02:47) taken from the first and final scenes of *Brokeback Mountain*. These scenes demonstrate a strong contrast between the mountain landscape that fills the screen at the start of the film and the diminished, postcard image at the end, which parallels the development of the main protagonists’ romantic relationship. The original AD was adjusted to reflect this contrast more effectively, as follows:
In this film, there is the interrelated theme of traditional belief and prejudice, a first sign of which are the dark, cross-like telegraph poles on the landscape as one of the main characters comes into town. This signifier is included in the original AD, which describes the telegraph poles as “silhouetted like crosses”. Three of the 5 participants who received this AD clip (1 sighted and 2 VI) consciously noticed this signifier, 1 of whom felt this to be an “aversive” sign. From the adjusted AD, which emphasised the telegraph poles further as “silhouetted like tall dark crosses”, 4 out of 5 participants (2 sighted and 2 VI) perceived this element of the mise-en-scène, 1 of whom (sighted) considered the ‘crosses’ to be ominous, “like death” and “crucifixion” (as later reinforced for this subject by the AV clip). From the adjusted AD, 1 subject (VI) found this to be a “strong visual” and religious “motif”.

In response to the original AD of the landscape in the first clip, 1 subject (VI) found this to be “sparse” and “barren”, another (VI) “dark” (in comparison to the final scene), and 1 other (sighted) visualising from the word ‘mountain’ and the AD of a truck, road and telegraph poles, a “very large, wide and dramatic” landscape. From the adjusted AD, 1 subject (sighted) mistakenly conceptualised someone looking out “surveying” a bleak landscape at the start of the film. One subject (sighted) found the landscape “expansive” and “vast” from the adjusted AD, and another (sighted) pictured a “vast” and unwelcoming landscape. This subject also tried to imagine how this might link to forthcoming relationships in the film, together with the ‘crosses’, and, from this, perceived a feeling of isolation, alienation, crucifixion, self-sacrifice or persecution. The same subject also picked up on the “crossroads” where one of the main characters is dropped off at the start and associated it with choices in his life. From the original AD of the final scene, 2 (VI) subjects mistakenly believed there to be a mountain landscape, 1 of whom imagined the character to be “really into the mountains”, with “some sort of clouds going past”. Two other subjects (VI) also erroneously felt the character to be looking out of a window: 1 at blue sky and the other at hills, whereas only a flat view of fields is evident in the imagery,

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<tr>
<td>00:34</td>
<td>00:39</td>
<td>Dawn begins to break over hills and wild country. Brokeback Mountain.</td>
<td>Day begins to break over a vast landscape of rolling hills and rugged mountains. Brokeback Mountain.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:02:33</td>
<td>2:02:47</td>
<td>He straightens the postcard of the mountains with the blue sky and wispy white clouds above them then shuts the door. / Through his trailer window, he can see fields, mountains and blue sky.</td>
<td>He straightens the postcard of the majestic blue mountains with blue sky and wispy white clouds then closes the door. / Through his trailer window, green fields stretch to a distant line of yellow fields below a pale blue sky.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
which the character ignores. From the adjusted AD of this scene, 2 subjects (1 sighted and 1 VI) correctly visualised a view of fields from the window, with one imagining them to be stretching towards the horizon. The other participant (sighted) also linked the postcard image of the mountain to the real mountain in the opening sequence, understanding the mountain to signify something important in the character’s life despite not having seen the film. Two subjects (1 sighted and 1 VI) did not think about the landscape at all during the adjusted AD of the final scene, which is appropriate at this stage in the story. Finally, from the AD of the final scene, almost all of the participants found significance in the description of clothing (the caress of the jumper and buttoning of the shirts inside each other), which was included in both forms of AD. In brief, whereas some signifiers were included in the original AD, as evoked certain figurative responses from the participants, the value of the additional signifiers in the adjusted AD was generally more helpful in more fully expressing the thematic messages for both the sighted and visually-impaired subjects.

In the third clip, taken from the beginning of *The King’s Speech* (00:26–02:00), there is a montage of multiple close-up shots of a radio microphone, images of a BBC announcer preparing to speak, and out of focus, off-centre shots of the Duke of York in the enclosed space of a stairwell. This sequence indicates the Duke’s fear of public speaking by emphasising a related object, the microphone, and contrasting distorted images of this character with shots of a confident BBC man. The audio description of this sequence was adjusted to emphasise the microphone in terms of repeated shots and the subtle personification of this ‘bold’ object:

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<td>00:26</td>
<td>00:31</td>
<td>A large, grey, oval microphone stands on a desk in an empty, wood-panelled, art deco room.</td>
<td>Different views of a large grey, oval microphone standing boldly on a desk in an empty art deco room.</td>
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The Duke’s anxiety in the face of public speaking was also emphasised in an adjustment to the AD to include, in particular, his positioning at the bottom of a staircase with a blocked means of exit:

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<td>00:52</td>
<td>01:16</td>
<td>Waiting on a staircase at the Stadium with his wife, Bertie, the Duke of York, nervously mouths the words of a speech. He’s wearing a top hat and morning coat and leather gloves. Looking on is a group of stern-faced gentlemen and the Archbishop of Canterbury.</td>
<td>Waiting at the bottom of a staircase at the Stadium with his wife, Bertie, the Duke of York, nervously mouths the words of a speech clasped in his hand. He’s wearing a top hat, morning coat and leather gloves. Gathered in front of an exit sign is a group of stern-faced</td>
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</table>
A radio announcer in formal black tie enters the art deco room with an attendant carrying a glass of water, a spittoon and a mouth spray. He drinks from the glass [Announcer gargles].

From the original AD, whilst 4 out of 5 subjects remarked on the “large”, “grey” or “old-fashioned” radio microphone, no comments were made in respect of its significance. Two of the subjects did, however, comment on the Duke’s nervousness, although no feedback was received concerning the positioning of this character, in relation to the staircase and exit to the stadium, for example. In fact, 1 subject (VI) said she was confused as to who was where from the AD. From the adjusted AD, although only 2 of the 5 subjects commented on the radio microphone, the feedback was more significant. One of these subjects (VI) visualised a close-up of the radio microphone on a desk, although describing this as a “simple” mental image. The other subject (VI) felt the microphone to be “a single thing in the room” that relayed a sense of anxiety. One (VI) participant also visualised the Duke at the bottom of a staircase with someone else at the top. However, the gargling sound effect caused difficulty for subjects in respect of both forms of AD, with 1 subject (VI) who listened to the adjusted audio confused as to who was gargling, and 2 others (sighted and VI) who received the original AD, assuming that the gargling was the Duke choking with emotion or that it was a dentist’s drill. Overall, however, the value of the subtle adjustments made to the original AD can be measured in terms of the difference this made to the significance of the imagery (the radio microphone and the positioning of the main protagonist, for example), which added a greater sense of anxiety for some of the respondents.

The final audio clip was taken from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (10:54–12:41). In the original AD, some elements of connotative imagery were included (the personified eagle statue and foreboding house, for example), although the confining image of the young male protagonist behind the ‘bars’ of a staircase was not. The AD was, therefore, adjusted to include this thematic motif, also adding details in respect of the family’s journey to their new home. For example:

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<td>ORIGINAL</td>
<td>ADJUSTED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:06</td>
<td>11:16</td>
<td>The car, which has small swastika flags fixed to the front fenders turns a bend. Father, who's at the wheel, puts on his General's cap. / In the back seat, his wife wakes the children.</td>
<td>The car, which has small swastika flags on the front fenders and suitcases strapped on the back, turns a bend. Father, in the front passenger seat, puts on his General's cap. / In the back, his wife wakes the children.</td>
</tr>
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As the car drives into the bare gravel courtyard, soldiers shut the gates behind them. Above their heads, a stone eagle with outspread wings watches them from the top of one of the gate posts. The family get out of the car and look up at the house.

Bruno looks at the tall leaded windows and forbidding grey façade. Inside, he sits on the stairs. The interior is all white walls and dark wooden fittings. The entrance hall is bare. As SS officers pass through into another room, Father looks across at his wife who’s trying to hide her discomfort.

Putting on a brave face, mother turns to the children. Bruno looks sulkily down through the balusters.

From the original AD, the swastika flags on the car were picked up by 2 (VI) participants. A number of the participants (3 sighted and 1 VI) also noted the austerity of the house and the eagle at the gates, with 1 of these (sighted) understanding the closing of the gates to be a sign of their being “trapped”. However, 2 subjects (VI) were confused as to who was driving the car from the original AD, although 1 of these subjects and 1 further subject (sighted) did understand the mother and children to be in the back, 1 of whom (sighted) believed this to symbolise their ‘imprisonment’ with a “barrier” between them and the father/regime. Three of the participants (2 sighted and 1 VI) also assumed that the boy must be unhappy in a strange place away from his friends, although no indication of this was given in the original AD, whilst another (sighted) erroneously understood the boy to have run upstairs to look around. However, 1 subject (sighted) additionally remarked on the “divide between the discomfort of the family and the General” created by the closing of the study door in the original AD audio. From the adjusted AD, 3 of the 5 participants understood the action to be in Germany, making this connection from either the swastikas on the car or the image of the eagle. One subject (sighted) also felt a change in atmosphere as the family arrived at their new house, which 3 of the 5 participants found to be an unhappy one, “like a prison” or “austere”. Two subjects (1 sighted and 1 VI) were also consciously aware of the ‘bars’ of the staircase and Bruno’s looking down through the balusters, with 1 further subject (VI) having the feeling that Bruno did not like the new house, although could not say why. In relation to the value of the connotational signifiers included in both forms of AD, it was clear that the majority of the participants were conscious of a German presence in the scene and of the sombre nature of the house. And although the additional imagery concerning the house was not remarked upon by the participants who received the adjusted AD, neither was this aesthetic composition distracting. There was also no confusion from the positioning of the father in the car in the
adjusted AD. And the additional reports of an unhappy atmosphere at the house and of Bruno's feelings in particular, which were generally derived from the motif of the boy's positioning on the staircase, gave some indication of how new meanings can be determined from film form (including framing, for example, and a character's isolated positioning).

It should be noted that a person's natural tendencies towards storytelling rather than 'visualisation' meant that the participants were generally keen to recount details of the action and characters (the elements of 'basic story') rather than of how the clips were semiotically constructed. Bias and memory distortion are also factors that can hinder accurate feedback (even though the segments were brief) and may increase with the stress of wanting to be 'right', which was found to be important for some of the participants. Furthermore, the factor of sub-conscious processing is significant in film viewing (as discussed in section 2.1.2), which can hinder the conscious recollection of imagery, particularly where messages are intentionally vague, fleeting or subliminal. The full extent of the subjects' processing of imagery could not, therefore, be determined from this audio exercise, and so was supported by an additional cognitive study in the form of a semi-structured interview in which further data concerning image interpretation was gathered from isolated verbal scenarios (see section 5.2). Despite the limitations of this methodological step, there was no doubt from the results that the semiotic content of mainstream films can enable the conceptualisation of form in diverse narrative contexts, to which both sighted and visually-impaired spectators are equally able to attribute secondary levels of significance. The prioritisation of semiotic content in the adjusted AD clips also went some way in demonstrating the added value of propositional content in film AD, where feedback exhibited additional and deeper understandings concerning themes, character psychology and atmosphere.

5.1.3. Comparison with full AV version

When the visual clips were shown to the sighted participants at the end of the test, some of the signifiers became more obvious to some of these subjects when compared to their feedback from the audio described audio clips. From the AV clip of *Black Swan*, for example, 1 of the sighted subjects commented on the mirror that the young woman stretches in front of, which was not mentioned in her response to the original extract of AD since this signifier was not included. The sighted subject who had picked up the symbolism of the three mirrors from the adjusted AD, surmised from the AV clip that this could indicate “a fractured self”. The participant who commented on the girl's childish pink
bedroom from the adjusted AD felt this to be even more emphatic in the visual image. And a further sighted subject who had not commented on the mirror that the mother looks into from the adjusted AD, now mentioned this when played the full AV version.

From the full AV clips from *Brokeback Mountain*, those sighted subjects who were played the original AD noted very little additional imagery, although 1 now picked up on a relationship from the final scene, which he had not previously perceived. Of those who had received the adjusted AD, 1 of the sighted subjects said that they had imagined the truck to be larger in the AD in comparison with the visual image, although the mountain symbolism, which she had previously reported as being indicative of what was significant in the character’s life, together with her earlier conceptualisations of the “crosses” and truck pulling up at a junction, were simply reinforced by the AV version. This subject also now commented that the close-up of the postcard view of the mountain was suddenly removed from view, as if symbolising lost opportunities in the man’s relationship. With the door closed, this subject noted “a bland landscape” from the window, which she had not earlier reported, and believed this could symbolise an “empty life”. One further subject (sighted) who had been played the adjusted AD also now considered the trailer to be in a poor condition in comparison with the pretty fields outside, which she had not previously reported despite the description of a “dishevelled trailer” in the adjusted AD. Another subject also now saw that he had incorrectly understood from the adjusted AD of the opening sequence that someone was watching the scene and that this was much deeper into the mountains.

From the AV clip of *The King’s Speech*, 1 of the sighted subjects noted the blocked exit, which was not audio described in the original AD that she was played. Another subject who had received the original AD now found the atmosphere to be “very threatening” for the main protagonist, with another only now appreciating that it was cold and that the character looked very nervous. This subject had also previously visualised a modern microphone, with 1 further subject now commenting that she had not previously realised the radio microphone to be “there all the time” from the original AD with the camera repeatedly cutting from the microphone shown from a number of angles to close-up and distorted images of the Duke. One of the sighted participants who had received the adjusted AD, also now remarked on the emphasis placed on the radio microphone: “they show it all the time, and bigger, smaller, every angle”, which she had not reported during the AD test from the simple description of “different views”.
From the AV clip of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, 1 of the sighted subjects who had picked up on the underlying themes of Nazism and entrapment, and the ‘coldness’ of the house from the original AD, found this to be reinforced in the AV clip in a shift from the “idyllic” imagery of countryside to the view of a car with swastikas, and, for her, the gates were now reminiscent more of a “concentration camp than gates of a house”. However, this subject had not perceived from the original AD that the boy separates himself off from his family and that he looks unhappy behind ‘prison-like’ bars of a staircase. Concerning the house, she also now commented that “normally windows are sort of a connection between the outside and the inside, but it didn’t feel like that. It felt like they were there to restrain and contain the family, again. I think it’s just lots of little messages of the family being taken there and trapped there”. Another of the sighted subjects who had been played the original AD, also now commented that: “The house was taller and squarer than I thought it would be” and, concerning Bruno’s feelings, that: “It’s obviously very daunting looking at that great big building. Being small, he’s looking up at it”. One of the sighted subjects who had received the adjusted AD, found the AV clip now reinforced her thoughts concerning Bruno’s feeling of unhappiness and the “prison” atmosphere of the house, as reported during the audio test. Another of the sighted subjects now commented on Bruno’s unhappiness and his positioning on the staircase, which he had not earlier reported from the adjusted AD.

To summarise, the overall responses to the visual imagery in the full AV clips largely reinforced the presence of content that can be understood in equivalent ways and on a secondary level by a number of different spectators. Whilst a great deal of the codified content of mainstream films will normally be processed subconsciously during viewing, by directly asking the sighted participants what they could see in the extracts of film in comparison to what they had visualised earlier from the AD, a more conscious reporting of content and form was enabled. Predictably, differences were inevitable between the original film images and both forms of AD. For example, mirror imagery in *Black Swan*, and the blocked exit and prevalence of the radio microphone in *The King’s Speech*, which were not in the original AD, but were now reported. One subject had also not previously conceptualised a relationship from the original AD of *Brokeback Mountain*, which he now understood. However, there was some reinforcement of what had already been reported from the original AD, particularly in respect of the included signifiers in the clip from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. For those who had received the adjusted AD, there was, again, reinforcement of what had been previously perceived, although this occurred to a greater extent, such as for the mirror symbolism in *Black Swan*, the mountain and ‘cross’ symbolism in *Brokeback Mountain* and the theme of imprisonment in *The Boy in the*
Striped Pyjamas. The pink bedroom in Black Swan was much more emphatic in the visual images for 1 subject, however, and a new comment was received concerning the mirror that the mother looks into. One subject also now saw that the postcard is removed from view in the final scene of Brokeback Mountain (although the character was described as closing the closet door in the adjusted AD). Another noted the dishevelled trailer (which was included in the adjusted AD), and 1 subject reported the multiple shots of the radio microphone (which was only briefly audio described in the adjusted AD). This lack of feedback concerning some of the additional signifiers in the adjusted AD in comparison with the original images may indicate that, although these were added to the original AD texts and were, therefore, a ‘gain’ in translation, they may still not have been emphatic enough to convey the intended message (although the need for a level of covertness in visual connotation should be taken into account). Conversely, the adjusted descriptions of such imagery as the truck and mountains in the opening of Brokeback Mountain gave an overly-emphatic impression to 2 of the sighted subjects in comparison with the original images, which may indicate that, although the description of “a distant highway” was added to the original AD of a “large truck”, and “a vast landscape” was added in emphasis of the mountain range, these were, again, not emphatic enough to express distance from the camera.

To conclude, although this exercise tested the comprehension of short extracts of AD on no more than 10 individuals, of which 5 are visually-impaired, so could not draw conclusions on how all visually-impaired spectators might process semiotic content from film AD, the testing of different AD versions did provide interesting data. For example, concerning the construction of mental imagery, some quite obvious patterns were observed in the responses, such as the invention of scenarios in the absence of AD. The sighted and visually-impaired subjects also fared equally well in distinguishing locations, actions and sounds, although music and sound effects were sometimes ambiguous and open to individual interpretation, particularly without the anchoring contexts of AD. A comparison of the visually-impaired and sighted subjects’ responses to the audio described clips also showed many similarities in how the expressive content of mainstream films can be perceived, where included in the clips they were played. It is worth noting, however, that 2 of the visually-impaired participants and 1 of the sighted subjects referenced more signifiers and provided greater detail overall in their responses, which is perhaps indicative of a greater interest in film and image analysis. Only 1 (sighted) subject did not convey any of the signifying content in the audio described clips and responded pragmatically even when presented with the full AV versions, which may demonstrate an inexperience in film viewing or a more inhibited approach to visual
analysis. It should also be noted that none of the visually-impaired participants commented on any uncustomary, obvious or excessive detail in the adjusted AD, which highlights how little modification is required to include semiotic content unobtrusively. Moreover, whilst the included signifiers (in both versions of AD) did not always prompt a response from the participants, this is not wholly surprising since a great deal of content is known to be processed subconsciously in film viewing, including implicit and subliminal messages (as referred to in section 2.1.2). Overall, the “psychological phenomenon” of image conceptualisation from language signifiers (Saussure, 1959: 11) was reinforced in the subjects’ responses to the audio described film clips, as well as upheld to be ‘social’ (see Frye, 1987: 4-5, for example, in section 2.1.1 on the social phenomena of symbols) and unaffected by VI. In other words, the coded language of narrative is conventional and familiar to spectators, even if they are unable to express them consciously (Berger, 1991: 12), which includes subjects with visual impairment.

A further limitation of the audio test was that people can be susceptible to assumption, personal feeling and preconceptions, with a general tendency to (unknowingly) create detail in the absence of certainty, whilst often being convinced that these details are correct despite AD or visual imagery to the contrary. For example, the ambiguous sound signifier of the BBC announcer’s vocal exercise in The King’s Speech led 1 sighted subject to believe that the Duke was stuttering despite an accurate description in the original AD. Another sighted subject maintained that bird song in The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas was a baby or doll crying even after watching the full AV clip. And, although the majority of the participants had not seen the films, of those who had, 1 of the sighted subjects incorrectly believed the early scene from Black Swan without AD, to take place outside between a girl and a man, and 1 visually-impaired subject imagined The King’s Speech to be set at the time of the 1948 Olympics despite an introduction in the AD to a speech at Wembley Stadium in 1925. In psychology, it is understood that “gap filling and reliance on assumptions are necessary to function in our society” (Engelhardt, 1999). The fallibility of witness memory in the “misremembering” of events, including events that did not take place, is another known phenomenon, where distortion might occur in the recounting of stories due to the unconscious susceptibility of memory to bias (Engelhardt, 1999). As Chmiel and Mazur also observed during the testing of AV media, "it is always problematic to measure the respondent’s comprehension after watching a film/clip because comprehension is difficult to quantify and because there is an important confounding variable that is difficult to rule out, i.e. memory" (2012: 70). The questioning of subjects on what they could visualise from audio samples was not, therefore, the most holistic way of understanding the perception and processing of semiotic form, although the
testing of a complete feature film, as an holistic system of signification, may generate more references to signifying content as these are built up through the narrative (as one of the VI participants agreed). However, an absence of conscious awareness in film viewing or the fallibility of spectator memory do not remove the necessity for semiotic content in film AD, and in addition to the values touched upon in the film and AD content analysis and in the AD tests, the results from the semi-structured interviews advanced further arguments in this respect.

5.2. Analysis of the semi-structured interview responses

To further gauge the value of semiotic content in film AD for target users, in response to research question 3, the AD testing exercise was immediately followed by a semi-structured interview with each of the 10 participants. Again, the aim of the interview was to generate qualitative data concerning the individuals’ “external and internal experiences” (Weiss, 1994: location 1394 of 4574), namely, their interest in mainstream film construction and the processing of connotative imagery in visual and verbal form. This was achieved through a number of open and closed-ended questions concerning the individuals’ sight conditions, viewing preferences and conceptualisation of imagery (see appendix 2 for the question structure), which could be compared between the individuals, as well as between the visually-impaired subjects and the sighted control group. Although the framework for this research is qualitative, the comparison of data items can also help to increase the certainty of findings. As Weiss states: “Without comparison cases there is no way to be sure” (1994: location 648 of 4574) and so the numbers of participants who responded in equivalent or different ways to the imagery were recorded. The interviews were also conducted on a one-to-one basis and in person to maximise accessibility for the interviewees, as well as to encourage spontaneity in the responses. The main question areas of the interview were: Viewing Habits; Audio Description (visually-impaired subjects only); Film Construction; Film Music; Product Placement; Film Scenarios, and Film Stills (sighted subjects only), the results of which are analysed below.

5.2.1. Viewing habits

The questions in the first part of the semi-structured interview were designed to understand the participants’ viewing experience and interest in mainstream films, which was expected to influence the depth of their responses to film imagery and what they might gain from watching films. Predictably, it was discovered that all of the participants watch films in different ways and with varying frequency, from once every few months to 8
or more films per month, and on average, approximately 2 films per month, which was comparable between the visually-impaired and sighted subjects. The subjects also prefer different film genres, from period dramas, to thrillers, adventure, comedy, horror, sci-fi, the latest releases, classic films and world cinema, which shows a diverse taste in content. DVD extras also do not interest 5 of the 10 subjects (2 sighted and 3 VI), although 2 (1 sighted and 1 VI) watch the extras when a film is of interest to them and another (sighted) will watch them only if she does not understand something, as she believes they detract from the enjoyment of a film and having one’s own ideas. One subject (VI) does, however, find the extras to be “illuminating”. Again, this shows diversity in the subjects’ viewing preferences and interest in filmmaking, although highlights a tendency in the first instance towards viewing rather than the technical understanding of how films are constructed.

5.2.2. Audio description

Specifically in respect of their experience of audio description, the 5 visually-impaired subjects were then asked what they like about it, what they believe could be changed, and whether they require additional help in understanding a film with the AD enabled. This was to learn about any quality issues that they may have considered now that AD is better established. The subjects have used AD for TV and films for approximately two to seventeen years (of whom the most experienced knew someone involved in the Audetel trials in the 1990s). All of the subjects enjoy audio description, 1 of whom believes the synching to be good, another who likes the inclusion afforded by access, 2 others enjoying the clarity AD brings, and another enjoying when they do not notice it. One of the subjects, who has used AD for five or six years, also believes that AD should “evolve” and that different methods could be explored. He also does not like factual mistakes. Another does not enjoy too much information spoken too quickly, and the remaining 2 subjects believe that audio levels could be changed, 1 of whom added that sound codes could be invented for use in place of some AD.

Touching upon the subject of mental imagery and preferred language forms, these subjects were then asked how they create mental pictures, whether from visual memory or experience, for example, and their thoughts on colours and metaphors in AD. The ability to create images from memory no doubt depends on the age of onset of visual impairment. However, all of the participants reported a degree of visual memory, from
very simple memories that include colours, to a recollection in three dimensions (although this subject accepted that the pictures are not always vivid and may be simply “ideas”), to visual memory with some residual sight. Moreover, 1 of the visually-impaired subjects added that descriptions of facial expressions, and music help them to form mental imagery. Of the two participants who have been blind since an early age, 1 is also able to conceptualise “quite simple images”, particularly if he has visited a location described, and the other reported an ability to infer the “power” of an image.

Even with AD enabled, 4 of the 5 subjects said that they sometimes need further clarification, although 1 said that they would not want this ‘distraction’ and enjoys being independent. It was also generally accepted that some additional information that is not known to sighted viewers will occasionally be given in the AD, with 1 of the participants being glad of this difference. It should also be noted that all 5 of the visually-impaired subjects confirmed that they use the same visual language as sighted viewers when talking about ‘watching’ films, although 1 clarified that this use of terminology is based on knowledge rather than actual experience. Concerning the reception of metaphor in film AD, 1 of the respondents believes these to be useful in the creation of mental pictures (in addition to voice and movement), with another believing that metaphors can be worthwhile if not overly-interpretative (with silence and some music just as meaningful in some contexts). However, 2 other respondents believe that the use of metaphor can be distracting, 1 of whom feels that this can sometimes conjure up imagery unrelated to a film, although admitted that this would depend, and the other admitted an appreciation of the imagery of the telegraph poles “like crosses” in the AD testing exercise, which he thought to be very meaningful and which he now associated with the concept of prejudice and the Klu Klux Klan. Concerning the inclusion of colours in AD, all 5 of these subjects are in favour of this whether due to colour memory, the belief that these will be meaningful to a lot of people, or the understanding that they can be used deliberately by filmmakers to create meaning. Overall, these responses indicate an existing appreciation of film AD and a general affinity with visual language (including colours and metaphors) particularly where this is clear and unobtrusive, although that there is some scope for improvement in AD, in terms of audio levels, for example, and even for the service to “evolve”, with more choice in the material described.

5.2.3. Film construction

All of the participants were then asked a number of questions in respect of how films are constructed; for instance, their interest in technical effects, camera movement and title
graphics and visual clues. This section linked with each of the research questions in respect of the importance of connotational imagery, its appropriateness of form in AD, and the value of this for spectators, being intended to draw the participants’ views on film construction at a deeper level and understand the types of content that they might be receptive to. The data showed an interest in camera work by 4 of the sighted subjects, 1 of whom finds this makes a difference in how a film is “put across”; and although the fifth sighted subject does not think she is interested in this, she confirmed that she understands the effect that this has on the manner in which one watches. Comparatively, 3 of the 5 visually-impaired participants expressed an interest in camera movement, 1 of whom finds this very important (although clarified that this is not usually included in AD).

Concerning the framing of characters, in close-up, etc., 3 of the sighted subjects expressed an interest in this also, with 1 feeling it to add “atmosphere”. Of the 2 who do not think they are interested in framing, 1 did, however, accept that this may still influence her. Comparatively, 4 of the visually-impaired subjects expressed an interest in framing, of whom 1 was very descriptive of how this is important in showing intention and revealing information about characters; another believing close-ups to be more “intimate”, and a third being particularly interested when this is trying to reveal something to the audience. Title graphics are also appealing to 3 of the sighted subjects and 2 of the visually-impaired subjects.

The respondents were additionally asked if they understood the expressions ‘fades to black’, ‘in flashback’, ‘grainy footage’ and ‘cross-cut’, which was intended to gauge their familiarity with common film techniques used in the creation of meaning. From this, it was observed that, whilst three of these terms were immediately understood by all 10 participants (1 of whom (VI) also confirming that, even though he has never seen ‘grainy footage’, he has an understanding of what this means), the phrase ‘cross cut’ posed problems for most of the participants. This may be because it is a more abstract, ‘specialist’ term than the general term ‘cut’, as well as being one of a number of different types of cuts possible in film editing. Here, 1 of the visually-impaired subjects said that he would be confused as to the difference between a cross cut (a cut between shots of simultaneous action in different locations) and a jump cut (discontinuous shots of the same subject). Of visual clues, all 5 of the sighted subjects expressed an interested in these, with 1 believing them to help with understanding what is going on, and another enjoying the suspense they create and guessing what will happen. Four of the visually-impaired subjects also expressed an interest in these, 1 of whom especially enjoys visual clues as an integral part of psychological thrillers, with another wanting to know about them if the sighted viewer would also appreciate these clues from the images. The
majority of the participants said that they are not particularly interested in whether characters are played by famous actors, however, only in their ability to act, although 1 subject (sighted) admitted an interest in the “credibility or gravitas” that they can assign to a film. Of the visually-impaired subjects, 1 confirmed that the naming of actors was fine in the credits only, with 1 other only interested in who is starring if she likes their voice. Regarding intertextual references, 4 of the sighted subjects and all 5 of the visually-impaired subjects expressed an interest in this, although 1 (VI) said that they would not want this to be made explicit in AD. These results highlight a general appreciation of the common aspects of mainstream filmmaking and how these influence meaning and atmosphere during viewing, although where previously 50% of the subjects expressed no interest in the DVD extras, it is felt that their interest in film construction stems from a familiarity with common techniques and understanding of its function rather than from any desire for this to be made more explicit.

5.2.4. **Film music**

The respondents were then asked questions concerning the ability of film music to assist in understanding and the encouragement of emotional response, as well as on the usefulness of signature tunes and musical motifs. This was to gauge the value of music signifiers in the participants’ processing of imagery. From the data gathered, it was understood that film music does sometimes help spectators understand what is happening, although not always. Four of the sighted subjects believe that it is helpful, with 1 adding that it “can improve the experience”, whilst admitting that it can become annoying, with another finding it “irritating” sometimes in its overuse. Of the visually-impaired participants, all of the subjects believe that it can help with understanding, although 1 believes that it can sometimes be “intrusive and obscuring”, with another believing that it would be better as ‘background’ as it is often too loud, and a third admitting that, without the image, it is not always clear from music alone what is happening. Three of the sighted subjects also believe that film music can be emotive, whilst it makes 1 “confused” or ‘distracted’ and another “angry”. By comparison, all 5 of the visually-impaired subjects confirmed that film music can make them feel something, for example, making you “lose yourself” and providing “a sense of mood”, giving an idea of what is going on, or creating context and tension, provided that it is used properly. Of musical motifs (such as repeated theme tunes), 4 of the 5 sighted subjects find that this can add something to a film and be meaningful, where relevant, 1 of whom acknowledged that this depends on how it is used, since it can also be patronising. Comparatively, 5 of the VI subjects said that they appreciate motifs in the soundtrack, 2 of whom believe this
to offer clues as to what is happening, such as a chase scene in a ‘Bond’ film, and another feeling that this can help in the absence of character names. The fourth, though, confirmed that this was provided that the music was not too loud or distracting, and the fifth admitting that he does not always pick up on motifs. In short, there were mixed feelings about how music is used in mainstream films, although the majority of the participants (both sighted and VI) confirmed that it can engender emotion, create atmosphere and be meaningful. The conclusion drawn, though, was that this would be largely in combination with other aspects of a film (the image contexts, for example), so despite the values reported, music was not considered sufficient in itself in the majority of cases to remove the need for AD. Interestingly, where film music was also reported to be “irritating” in its over-use, ‘distracting’, “intrusive” or “overpowering” at times (for both sighted and visually-impaired subjects), as also reported during the audio tests, this would seem to reflect a conscious rather than subconscious perception of sound, which calls into question Smith’s theory concerning the ‘inaudibility’ of film music (1996: 230) (see section 2.1.2).

5.2.5. **Product placement**

Brand name products, or “consumer objects”, are “a network of floating signifiers that are inexhaustible in their ability to incite desire” (Baudrillard, 1988: 3). However, the explicit placement of branded products in mainstream films, which the spectator has no choice but to engage with, unlike other forms of advertising, which can be indulged in or evaded to a certain extent, can provoke rather less favourable reactions. The participants were asked their thoughts on product placement to gauge the potential value of this in AD. In this respect, whilst understanding the signs of advertising in mainstream film, 50% of the participants interviewed (1 visually-impaired and 4 sighted) indicated an aversion to product placement. Of the remaining respondents, although 1 visually-impaired subject found references to product placement annoying in the AD of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Oplev, 2009), stating that: “They’re constantly at a desktop with the Apple logo glowing at us out of the screen”, he is also interested in this because of the “politics” that it can bring to a film, for instance in terms of where the budgets might come from. Another of the visually-impaired subjects appreciates the “comedy value” of product placement and can understand the interest some viewers might have in certain brands in certain films, such as the cars in ‘Bond’ films. The 1 sighted subject who expressed an interest in product placement said that she is drawn by cars and gadgets: “I like technology, so I like seeing phones, technological things being used and how they’re used […], what purpose they serve, and I love cars, so I enjoy looking at and hearing the cars”. What can be
determined from these results is that, whilst half of the subjects are not interested in product placement, there is value for some spectators in the diegetic usage of products in mainstream films. This value is derived from its association with particular characters, a personal interest in certain products or a curiosity in films as products themselves in a consumer society. Interestingly, 80% of the visually-impaired subjects interviewed expressed some interest in branded products in films, although it is understood that only products considered relevant to characterisation and story are currently audio described (see section 4.3.2). A larger study would, therefore, be required to verify whether this interest is wider spread and whether levels of interest would be maintained if product placement were to increase in film AD.

In relation to the feedback received during the audio sampling test, these responses in the first part of the semi-structured interview reinforced the understanding that constructed form can alter a spectator’s perception, although where 50% of the subjects expressed no interest in DVD extras, this perhaps reflect a preference for constructed content to remain implicit. Particularly where the majority of the subjects (both sighted and visually-impaired) reported an interest in different genres, camera effects, visual clues and framing, this corresponded to the way in which some of the content was referred to in the AD test, such as the referencing of strong visual motifs in terms of what these might represent in the narrative (for example, the mirrors in *Black Swan*, ‘crosses’ in *Brokeback Mountain*, positioning of the Duke in *The King’s Speech*, and separation of the boy from his family in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*). And although not all of the film signs were interpreted in the test by the participants who stated an interest in film construction, particularly the more obscure propositions (such as the tentative intertextual reference to *The Searchers* in *Brokeback Mountain* where Ennis caresses an article of clothing), the significance of content in connotational terms was widely observed nevertheless. Whilst film music is also generally appreciated by the subjects in terms of the meanings and emotional atmosphere that this can create, it was accepted that this usually requires the support of other elements in the narrative to make sense. Product placement also received mixed reviews from the participants, although its general value can be measured in terms of the entertainment and information gained from certain products by some. In response to research question 3, the value of connotative elements of genre, composition, camera techniques, montage, music and sounds for the participants clearly relates to the meanings, emotion and atmosphere that can be derived from such content. To support these findings with more concrete examples of how visual constructions can be understood, the respondents were then asked sets of questions relating to actual mainstream film imagery.
5.2.6. Film scenarios

The next part of the interview was a word association section in which the participants were related a number of brief, verbal scenarios and asked what they first thought of. These scenarios were taken directly from scenes in the mainstream films reviewed during the pilot and full study (although were not from the original AD) and incorporated straightforward to more obscure elements of imagery. As previously detailed in the methodology chapter (see section 3.4.3), these short descriptions excluded the original soundtrack elements so as to focus the participants’ attention on the imagery in question without distraction. The contexts of these descriptions were also limited, although additional context was sometimes provided after a pause that allowed for an initial response (as indicated by an oblique in the italicised examples below, and shown in full in appendix 2). The general aim of this part of the semi-structured interview was to understand the extent to which signifying form could be interpreted figuratively by the participants, whether through film convention or cultural association, for example, in direct support of the earlier findings. During this exercise, both the sighted and visually-impaired subjects responded spontaneously and in similar ways to the majority of the scenarios. The data gathered also showed overwhelmingly that connotative meanings can be derived from mainstream film imagery, even in verbalised form. Almost all of the scenarios, even the more abstract, were interpreted in some way by the respondents, with the majority of meanings processed figuratively. And although imagery can sometimes mean different things to different people, the differences observed during this part of the interview were largely subtle and limited in variation. What these results highlight is that, even in the absence of sight, the visual imagery of film can be meaningful on equivalent and secondary levels of significance to diverse types of people. The results also reinforced the general ‘obviousness’ of semiotic content in mainstream films and complemented the interpretations made during the film and AD content analysis and the audio sampling test. These results are discussed in more detail below with consideration made of the values derived from film imagery, in response to research question 3.

As previously, it has been considered that if films have codes, then these are of a “very easily acquired sort” since films are profuse with “easily learned visual effects” (Bordwell, 1996a: 95). However, it remained to be determined whether the codes and visual effects of mainstream films could be easily understood by visually-impaired spectators from audio description. During the film and AD content analysis, many signifying forms were easily recognised and interpreted due to conventional usage in film construction, such as framing, camera focus, lighting cues, and so on (see section 4.3), and a number were also
consciously perceived and interpreted in equivalent ways during the audio tests (the mirror imagery in *Black Swan* and mountain symbolism in *Brokeback Mountain*, for example, as discussion in section 5.1.2). Similarly, in the film scenario section of the semi-structured interview, there was a natural tendency to make figurative interpretations from the majority of the signifiers proposed.

A number of the responses were inherently cultural in association, such as those to the scenario: “A lighted candle between two people”. In Western culture, a lighted candle can be a votive or romantic symbol, or in the case of this scenario from *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (Fincher, 2008), a symbol of unity between two people, as inferred during the film analysis. The significance of this description for 70% of the participants (3 sighted and 4 VI) was romance or intimacy, 3 of whom (1 sighted and 2 VI) interpreted this as an intentional film construction designed to convey some kind of meaning (a “divide or connector” between characters, for example). Only 1 respondent (sighted) interpreted this imagery denotatively as “restaurant”. A further symbol of unity was commonly interpreted from the scenario: “A large entrance sign with a man and an alien in a circle holding hands up in the air”. The sign in this description can be considered unusual, although its individual features are conventional, with figures holding hands indexical of union, the raised hands a form of jubilation and the different species on the sign representative of different nations. All but 2 of the participants (1 sighted and 1 VI) equated this image with some type of “unity”, “alliance” or a site where everyone is welcome or lives together. One of the remaining 2 subjects (sighted) thought of “marriage, possibly sex”, being alternative forms of union, although 1 (VI) thought intertextually of the film *Aliens* (Cameron, 1986). Additionally, the scenario: “A group of people hoisting the American flag on Independence Day”, taken from *Grown Ups* (Dugan, 2010), is a unifying sign. The flag commonly appears in American films, being symbolic of patriotism, unity and even family. Flag raising itself is also an assertive expression (Cirlot, 2001: location 3003 of 9304) and, in this context, conveys the strong bond of friendship. Eighty percent of the participants (4 sighted and 4 VI) associated this scenario with patriotism, with 1 other (sighted) mentioning the film *Born on the Fourth of July* (Stone, 1989), and 1 (VI) imagining the group to be “celebrating”.

Moreover, the use of religious symbolism in the descriptions encouraged conventional responses; for example, to the scenario: “A man lying unmoving on the ground his arms outstretched in the shape of a cross / He’s just been shot”, from *Gran Torino* (Eastwood, 2008). Before the additional context of the man’s having been shot was given, the symbolic positioning of his body in the shape of a cross was expected to encourage
religious references, and although the participants were not explicitly told that he is dead, it was expected that this would be inferred from the cruciform. From this description, 1 of the participants (sighted) thought of crucifixion, 1 (sighted) that the man was a martyr, 1 (VI) of a cross, and another (VI) of *The Omen* (Donner, 1976). Only 2 of the respondents (1 sighted and 1 VI) thought that he was drunk or had suffered an accident. Seven participants (5 sighted and 2 VI) also understood that he was dead, and 2 of the visually-impaired participants remarked that the positioning of the character in the shape of a cross was deliberate, 1 of whom felt this to convey some kind of message. Similarly, the scenario: “A statue of a skeleton in a church wearing a veil, its arms crossed over its chest / The statue is shown before a murder”, taken from *Angels and Demons* (Howard, 2009), was predicted to be connotative of death. With religion and murder playing a major part in the storyline of this film, it seems appropriate that many signifiers would bear religious or deathly connotation. In this imagery, which precedes the death of a Cardinal, the camera lingers on a sculpture of a skeleton over a tomb in a church. From the mise-en-scène, there is little doubt of impending death and the feeling that the authorities are too late. Although, without this context, the message was less obvious for the participants, the majority (5 sighted and 4 VI) associated this image with death or religious icons (“a tomb”, “Mary” or “like an angel”, for example), 6 of whom (2 sighted and 4 VI) believed that it could mean or forewarn the approach of death or a negative event when the additional context was given. One of the participants (sighted) also made an intertextual link between this image and Munch’s painting *The Scream* (1893), with another thinking it “macabre” or “frightening”. One of the visually-impaired participants could find no meaning in this description in either context.

Ideological conceptualisations were also ‘easily’ formed from some of the scenarios. For example: “A stack of dolls discarded in a dark cellar / It is a film set in Nazi Germany”, taken from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (Herman, 2008), links the signifying forms of “dolls”, “cellar” and “Nazi Germany”. As previously stated, dolls are symbolic of “an infantile state” (Cirlot, 2001: location 2516 of 9304), which, in the context of this film, can be associated with a loss of innocence, or, more darkly, with the disposal of young lives in the Holocaust, which were deemed appropriate readings in the film content analysis. The initial responses to this scenario by the sighted participants was “childhood left behind”, “very lucky daughter”, “punishment”, “horror”, “scary”, and to the visually-impaired subjects, “child abuse”, someone “clearing out”, a metaphor for childhood or lost children, “creepy” or “a ghost story”. From the additional context, the majority of the participants associated the image with the belongings of lost children, “horror”, “Holocaust” or “the destruction of innocence”, with 1 subject (VI) recalling the original scene from the film.
Stereotypes are also culturally conventional, including those of popular film, which was reinforced in the participants’ responses. The scenario: “Light coloured clothing on one character and dark coloured clothing on another character / They are two cowboys”, for example, taken from Brokeback Mountain (Lee, 2005), evoked the same conventional response determined as intentional during the film content analysis. In traditional Hollywood westerns, light and dark coloured clothing has commonly indicated good and bad characters, which Metz believes was overused and eventually abandoned (1974: 70). However, the majority of the participants (of various generations) still recognised this marker. In fact, 80% (5 sighted and 3 VI) interpreted this scenario as the bad guy and the good guy, with all of the participants noting some difference or opposition (“night and day” or “enemies”, for example). Two of the visually-impaired participants also thought that the filmmaker was intentionally inferring something in this usage.

Gender stereotypes were also spontaneously evoked by some of the scenarios; for example: “A woman in a long red dress with bright red lipstick / Everything else is shown in black and white”. Traditionally, in film, women have been objectified as “signs which signify ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’” (Mulvey, 1975, referenced by Bignell, 2002: 188), and red lipstick can also be erotically suggestive (Danesi, 1999: 51). This is the case in this scene from Sin City (Miller, 2005) in which an attractive female is strongly emphasised against the black and white, graphic novel style cinematography. Interestingly, all of the initial responses to this scenario by the 5 sighted participants were negative, describing the woman as a “vamp”, “tart”, “siren”, “expensive” or “prostitute”. Comparatively, 3 of the visually-impaired participants imagined the woman to be a “femme fatale”, “sexy” or “a woman who is using something to get something”. The remaining 2 visually-impaired subjects (adventitiously and congenitally blind) described the woman denotatively as either “a gypsy” or by simply imagining her appearance and describing her dress. With the additional context of black and white imagery, 3 of the sighted participants now believed the figure to be “an important female character”, an “object of desire” or symbol of “passion”, whilst 1 visually-impaired participant considered her to be “alone or isolated and, therefore, deserving of sympathy”, with another 2 noting the intention of a visual metaphor where the character is projected or targeted to stand out. The 2 visually-impaired subjects who had imagined the female denotatively, were unable to assign further meaning to this image. By comparison, the responses to the scenario: “A good looking man driving a fast sports car / He works for the Secret Service”, from Casino Royale (Campbell, 2006), contains strong signifiers indicative of the virility of the male character. As previously, a car can connote the body and be “an extension of sexual persona” (Danesi, 1999: 60), which, taken with the attractiveness of this character and the
additional context of his job, were expected to indicate a sophisticated hero and, most likely, James Bond. Unsurprisingly, all of the visually-impaired and sighted participants associated this scenario with Bond or another heroic fictional figure (Matthew Bourne, for example), or a certain type of man or situation: “sexy”, “exciting”, “secretive”, “detached” or “danger”.

Another gender stereotype was intentionally suggested in the metaphorical framing of a female character, as if behind bars, in the scenario: “A housewife looking out of a window with the horizontal slats of a blind shown in front of her face / The film is set in Fifties America”. A metaphor is proposed by analogy in filmmaking (Berger, 1991: 21), and, in this scenario from Revolutionary Road (Mendes, 2008), the slats are a metaphor for the confinement of the housewife in the home. Sixty percent of the participants (3 sighted and 3 VI) imagined this character to be trapped as though “imprisoned”, “suppressed” or “a victim”. And from the additional context of Fifties’ America, 1 of these participants (VI) inferred that the character was in a small, “parochial” town, and another (VI) that the image enforced how women are portrayed in films. These interpretations were equivalent to those made during the film content analysis. Of the remaining participants, 3 (1 sighted and 2 VI) denotatively considered the woman to be nosy, whilst another (sighted) simply imagined her in “shadows”. Additional responses to framing were also expected from the scenario: “A boy sitting alone at the top of a staircase looking through the wooden bars of the balusters”, taken from The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas (Herman, 2008), where there is, again, connotation that the boy is trapped behind ‘bars’, as discussed during the full film analysis. Three of the participants (2 sighted and 1 VI) noted sadness or isolation in this imagery, with 3 others (1 sighted and 2 VI) describing the lack of freedom or imprisonment that it brought to mind. For 1 further subject (VI), the description of the staircase made her think intertextually of J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter (1997), a character ‘imprisoned’ in an under-stairs cupboard. These responses were also comparative to those from 3 of the 5 subjects who received the adjusted AD in the audio sampling test, which included this imagery. Of the 3 remaining subjects, 2 (1 sighted and 1 VI) thought denotatively that the scenario entailed spying and 1 (sighted) that the boy had been naughty, making this image a more covert form of expression. Conversely, however, 90% of the participants (4 sighted and 5 VI) equated the scenario: “A grey concrete house with a high perimeter wall / There is an eagle above the gates”, from the same film, with a prison or fortified building and the remaining subject (sighted) felt it to be “foreboding”. With the additional context of the eagle at the gates, 90% of the participants (4 sighted and 5 VI) imagined the house to be in Germany or Austria, or visualised a concentration camp or military base.
Alternative meaning for framing was found in the scenario: “A person framed in a doorway who won’t enter the room”, taken from Never Let Me Go (Romanek, 2010), although also observed in The King’s Speech (Hooper, 2011) and The Curious Case of Benjamin Button (Fincher, 2008). In a similar way to the interpretations made from this visual metaphor during the film analysis, such as the emotional distance between characters, the majority of the participants imagined from this scenario that the character might be feeling “scared”, “reticent”, “shy”, ‘trepid’ or “trapped” (5 sighted), and “estranged”, “afraid”, or that something negative had happened or is happening there (3 VI). One of the other visually-impaired participants also believed that framing the character in this way is intentional, and he astutely conceptualised a back-lit silhouette effect of lighting around the figure. The other visually-impaired participant thought of a vampire, which links intertextually to the framing of a vampire in a coffin-shaped doorway in the expressionist film Nosferatu (Murnau, 1922), as determined during the film analysis.

The confinement and movement of characters in and along corridors and pathways was another common and expressive motif observed during the film analysis. It was, therefore, expected that the scenario: “Someone walking away down a long corridor / He’s a teacher who has just been reprimanded by the Headmaster”, taken from The History Boys (Hytner, 2006), might express something more significant to the participants through the ‘displacing’ effect of the corridor (Connor, 2004: online). For Kress and van Leeuwen, cinematic “disconnection” positions characters in ‘isolation’, showing them divorced from their ‘goals’ (2006: 259), and, in this case, the teacher is outcast as a result of inappropriate behaviour, removed from his position of influence. This corridor, therefore, represents change and the character’s walk of sadness and shame. Three of the participants (1 sighted and 2 VI) associated the words “sadness”, “isolation”, “remorse”, “reluctant” or “sulking” with this image, with 2 others (1 sighted and 1 VI) thinking of “bureaucracy” or a “sort of walking the plank”. A number of the participants (3 sighted and 3 VI) also believed the character to be leaving for a negative reason, 2 of whom (1 sighted and 1 VI) described this as “disappearance” and “becoming unreachable”. One other (VI), more obscurely, associated this scenario with a haunted house in a horror film, which reflects his interest in this genre, as well as an association of the corridor with the fear of the unknown; a response that did not change with the additional context.

More technical and abstract form was also interpreted in some way by each of the participants. For example, the scenario: “A person or a group of people walking in slow motion / After an event”, from the film Grown Ups (Dugan, 2010), although much less obvious in meaning within a limited context, was, nevertheless found to be significant on a
secondary level by some of the participants. In this description, slow motion imagery is used to connote the strong union of old high school friends at the start of a symbolic basketball ‘battle’. Although more difficult to process without this information, 2 of the subjects (1 sighted and 1 VI) understood this to symbolise either “victor and conquered” or characters about to fight, with 1 other (sighted) associating it with “something epic” and that a job had been accomplished. Another of the participants (VI) associated this with characters either making an entrance or an exit, with 4 others (1 sighted and 3 VI) believing this to indicate change (the beginning or end of something, for example), 1 of whom (VI) felt the slow motion action to be intentionally meaningful, giving the spectator time to analyse the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of what had happened. Other interpretations were denotative, including dancing in a musical (1 sighted), an action replay (1 sighted) or that the characters were being careful (1 VI), with 2 subjects (sighted) making an intertextual reference to Reservoir Dogs (Tarantino, 1992) in which this stylistic device is also used.

Another common, yet more abstract device of composition in mainstream filmmaking is the use of mirrors, as observed during the film analysis. In a scenario in different contexts: “A person studying someone else in a mirror / It is a woman looking at a man / It is a ballerina looking at another dancer”, for example, taken from Brokeback Mountain (Lee, 2005), Thor (Branagh, 2011) and Black Swan (Aronofsky, 2010), the mirror indicates interest in the person being watched. For Danesi, “gazing” is a sexual signal (1999: 57), and in each of these films, there is evident sexual tension between the characters involved. With the additional context of a woman looking at a man (from Thor) and of a ballerina looking at another dancer (from Black Swan), this tension was expected to be interpreted conventionally, as attraction or competitiveness, respectively. Three of the participants (1 sighted and 2 VI) understood from the initial description that the person was trying to look at the other person without them realising, 1 of whom (VI) also considered that this could be “sinister” or that they might be afraid to look at them directly, and another (sighted) considering the act of looking at someone else in a mirror to be lecherous. But 2 visually-impaired participants either associated this imagery with a ghost or were unable to conceptualise anything from it. With the additional context of a woman looking at a man, 60% of the subjects (3 sighted and 4 VI) now imagined some form of attraction or interest in the man on the part of the woman. And with the further context of a ballerina looking at another dancer, 80% associated the scene with envy or competition (5 sighted and 3 VI), with 1 other subject (VI) more creatively believing the character to be imagining herself (framed) in the other dancer’s position. Only 1 of the participants (congenitally blind) could not associate the mirror image of dancers with anything. More simply, the scenario: “A person studying themselves in a mirror”, was predicted to evo...
conventional concepts such as vanity or self-study, and, in fact, 50% of the participants (2 sighted and 3 VI) associated this with narcissism, with others imagining “learning”, “endeavour for perfection” or “self-reflection” (3 sighted), or “seeing if they are just as good” or a self-image “psychotherapy” of how others see them (3 visually-impaired). These results were, again, comparative to the feedback concerning mirror imagery, where included in the audio described clip from *Black Swan* in the audio testing exercise, in which 3 out of 5 subjects (1 VI and 2 sighted) directly referred to the mirrors, 1 of whom (sighted) imagined the character to be “self-centred or insecure” and “self-questioning”.

The most abstract example of composition was described in the scenario: “A completely white ranch house with an all-white interior and an old couple wearing pale clothing inside / Their son has just died”, taken from *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005). This was interpreted in the film analysis as indicative of death or decay in the traditional values of the American Mid-West. The colour of the house and the clothing could be read literally, but since metonymic associations can be formed from coded contexts (Berger, 1991: 22), it was expected that this might also be taken as a signifier of purity, homogeneity, sterility or emptiness, etc. This abstract scenario conveyed slightly conflicting meanings to the sighted respondents who described it as “dream-like”, “a drab life”, “sadness”, “puritanical [...]”; Pilgrim America”, or “peaceful”, and to the visually-impaired subjects, who thought of the words “ethereal” or “ghosts”, that the characters like “to be seen as virtuous and clean”, or conceptualised a “mental asylum”. With the additional context of the passing of the couple’s son, 2 of the sighted participants thought of “sadness”, whilst 1 (VI) associated this with “mourning” and another with “heaven”. However, 1 subject (congenitally blind) found it difficult to visualise pale clothing on a white background, so could not determine any meaning from this scene. By comparison, the symbolism used in the blockbuster *2012* (Emmerich, 2009), might be considered much easier for audiences to process. For example, the scenario: “A couple split by a large crack that appears in the floor”, denotes an earthquake in a supermarket scene in this film, whilst the split in the floor is also analogous with cracks appearing in the couple’s relationship. As such, a clichéd response was predicted, and, in fact, 90% of the participants (5 sighted and 4 VI) imagined this to be a metaphor for “divorce”, “division”, “separation” or a “doomed relationship”, with only 1 participant (adventitiously blind) associating the imagery with “a dream” or “nightmare”.

In focusing the participants’ attention on isolated samples of imagery, these results fundamentally highlight that, even in verbal form, the content of mainstream films can be significant in connotative and often analogous ways for people of different ages,
backgrounds and interests, including both congenitally and adventitiously blind individuals. This correlates with the idea that there is a high level of correspondence in language usage amongst people of “the same speech community” (Nida, 1964: 51), that is, of “the same signs united with the same concepts” (Saussure, 1959: 12), including amongst people who are visually-impaired, even when this is used in the description of visual form. These results support the earlier findings of the film and AD content analysis and AD audio tests in that equivalent cultural and thematic interpretations were found across each of the different qualitative methods. And although some visual expression in film is intentionally covert or more ‘specialised’ in the way it is coded (Metz, 1974: 112), which led to some variations in the data, this was not the norm, although denotation in the responses did also confirm that, in the absence of experience or more ‘specialist’ knowledge, imagery can still be understood literally. Interestingly, the conceptualisation of more complex constructions may not be straightforward for some people (both sighted and visually-impaired), even denotatively. Overall, however, the data gathered from this part of the semi-structured interview was able to respond to research question 3 by illustrating the responsiveness of the participants to semiotic content in verbal form, highlighting the value of this in meaning-making and in the deeper appreciation of narrative.

5.2.7. Film stills

In the final part of the semi-structured interview, the 5 sighted subjects were shown a number of stills taken from the mainstream films previously reviewed (during the pilot study and full qualitative analysis) and asked what they could see (see appendix 2 for the images shown). This was a small complementary exercise in support of the interpretations made during both the film analysis in section 4.2 and the AD audio test in section 5.1, as well as in the preceding section of film scenarios, which explored the hypothesis that mainstream film imagery can be meaningful on wider levels to different people. Through the use of conventions in filmmaking and the differentiation of form, the responses to the film stills were expected to highlight important elements of connotation and how these might be understood, in response to research question 1, as well as to be fairly similar amongst the respondents. Again, by isolating film shots from the accompanying sound and moving images, this method of extracting data aimed to focus the participants’ attention more closely on the imagery and encourage the conscious processing of content. As Barthes states, “the filmic, very paradoxically, cannot be grasped in the film ‘in situation’, ‘in movement’, ‘in its natural state’, but only in that major artefact, the still” (1977: 65). As such, “the still is not a sample [...] but a quotation” (1977: 67) that can be
‘read’ at leisure, free from “technical constraint” (1977: 68). As a result, the 5 sighted participants took time over each picture, detailing what they could see in different parts of the images in a practical and literal way (the signifiers of soldiers putting up a flag or a little boy looking out of a window, for example). But as the information was consolidated, a ‘quotation’ (or expression) emerged in many cases in a connotative interpretation of form, including of how the characters might be feeling. These results reinforced that wider significance can be found in mainstream film imagery and that interpretations are regularly consistent amongst different types of people. In turn, this supports the notion that imagery relating to more than ‘first level story’ is accessible to both audio describers and visually-impaired spectators, being fairly straightforward to recognise and understand; as relates to research question 2 concerning the appropriateness of imagery in AD. Additionally, in respect of research question 3, the value of semiotic content was found to emanate, not only from the cognitive challenges proposed, which required the ‘figuring out’ and consolidation of different signifiers, but also from the signifieds themselves, from which new meanings and stories could be derived, whilst existing knowledge and beliefs were reinforced. The results from the film stills section of the semi-structured interview are outlined in more detail below.

As discussed previously, film narrative is often ‘realist’ (Metz, 1974: 21), being based on features representative of reality (Eco, 1979: 221; Turvey, 1997: 433; Walton, 1997: 60). And although the world of popular film is ‘mediated’ (Lehman and Luhr, 2008: 20), the codes used are fairly straightforward to allow them to be understood by the masses. Cultural iconography, for example, is common, such as national symbols, art references and religious icons. In Flags of Our Fathers (Eastwood, 2006), for example, the main subject of the film is the raising of the American flag on Iwo Jima, from which all of its other themes emerge. Here it should be noted that, although the iconic photograph of this event is audio described as: “The raising of the American flag on Iwo Jima”, a fuller description is never given, with some loss in the significance of this action. From a film still of the flag raising, 2 of the 5 sighted subjects thought of “patriotism” and the other 3 of victory, 1 of whom remarked that the small, organised figures look like “toy soldiers”, which gives an indication of further associations that can be made from film form. Another cultural icon is the ‘Hollywood’ sign in the Hollywood Hills of Los Angeles, which is imitated in Shrek Forever After: The Final Chapter (Mitchell, 2010) in a sign for the city Far Far Away. This is included in the AD, audio described as: “They approach a hillside with ‘Far Far Away’ written on it in big white letters, like the famous ‘Hollywood’ sign [...] Shrek sees the ‘Far Far Away’ sign is smashed and falling down”. Here, the iconography is made explicit for a younger audience and the parody of the city’s degeneration is
appropriately conveyed through the state of the sign. From the film still, 3 of the 5 participants referred to the similarity of the lettering to that of the 'Hollywood' sign, with 3 describing some kind of destruction. Here, the cultural analogy contributed to the ease of the participants’ perception and meaning-making from the sign.

A more ‘specialised’ cultural association can be made from the opening credits of *St Trinian’s* (Parker and Thompson, 2007) in which the graphics resemble Banksy's illegal and illustrious graffitist art and portray, amongst other imagery, a schoolgirl with pigtails being padded down by a policeman. The Banksy theme is confirmed on the media production agency’s website, which describes a “wacky title sequence paying subtle [sic] homage to Banksy's graffiti”, which links to further animations in the film including during an art “heist” (VooDooDog: online). This graffitist art is, therefore, a pun on one level and a narrative sign on another. No reference to Banksy is made in the original AD, however. From the film still, 3 of the 5 sighted participants described this image as a “Banksy”, with 3 noting a policeman or "authority". The responsiveness to this amusing genre clue, both in intertextual and denotative terms, highlights its simplicity and the value of such content in setting up events and creating structure in the narrative, being a first step in the assimilation of events. Its absence from the AD is, therefore, a loss for the target audience in terms of thematic links and the entertainment that may be derived from an appreciation of the analogy.

Cultural associations can also be made from colours. Red, for example, is sometimes associated with danger, blood and death in Western culture (Cirlot, 2001: location 1893 of 9303). The red uniform worn by Chief Engineer Olson in *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009) might, in this way, be taken as a foreboding sign in addition to its denotative function. More profoundly, the colour of the uniform is an intertextual link to the TV series in which characters in red uniforms often die during missions. On Chief Engineer Olson, the film’s Producer Damon Lindelof confirms in the DVD commentary: “I love that we just embraced the fact that this guy is dead. He's dead with a capital 'D'. Red shirt, number one” (50:30–50:37). *Star Trek* fans would enjoy this feature, although the intertextual reference is more ‘specialised’ and, therefore, less likely to be picked up by all viewers. From the film still, none of the 5 sighted participants mentioned this visual clue or predicted forthcoming events, which confirmed its more covert and 'specialist' nature. This does not mean that the signifier has no value, however, since franchise-specific content is important in differentiating genre and providing continuity in a series for fans. Where the colour of the uniform is included in the original AD, therefore, this is appropriately faithful to its purpose.
In terms of ideological imagery, the three prominent cross-shaped telegraph poles that loom darkly against the landscape in *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005), bear a strong resemblance to religious iconography and the Crucifixion. As such, they present a foreboding image in the first moments of the film, as partially conveyed in the original AD. From a film still of this imagery, 4 of the 5 respondents mentioned crosses and/or crucifixion, with the fifth seeing "desolation". Again, this reinforces the interpretation made in the film content analysis and the equivalences that can be found in the responses to semiotic content. Another ideological expression is a cross-fade image from the German officer to the stone eagle in front of the house in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (Herman, 2008), which, although fleeting (and, therefore, not audio described), presents the powerful subliminal proposition that the two figures are the same (the soldier and the Third Reich of which the eagle was a symbol). From the film still, only 1 of the respondents picked up on the layering of the figures, with 2 others associating the image with Nazism and another with death (linking this intertextually to a grey house in Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* in which the Lady dies). This shows that straightforward, corresponding associations can be made from cues created in the montage, although that the construction of form itself may be much less consciously perceived. A further image from this film is where the small face of the soldier’s son is shot in the corner of a cross-shaped window frame resembling a swastika (not audio described), although this composition may not have been intentionally ideological. From this image, 1 of the sighted subjects mentioned bars on the window, with another believing the image to be prison-like, with the frame of the window covering the boy's mouth as if to 'silence' him, and believing that she saw a swastika in the shape of the window frame. The 3 other sighted subjects thought simply that the boy was being "secretive" or "spying", in a denotative reading of the shot. However, from another still of the boy, this time in long shot, distanced from his family and looking out through the balusters of a staircase, 1 of the respondents remarked on the horizontal and vertical lines ‘cutting through’ him, with 3 others noting his lack of freedom. These responses highlight the different degrees of covertness, or ‘obviousness’, in the visual semiotics of mainstream film, with more cognitive effort or knowledge required in the interpretation of some creative expressions, and, thus, highlight the aesthetic and thematic values that can be derived on different levels, including on the connotative plane, as similarly derived in the film content analysis.

Gender stereotypes are also common cultural frames of reference, as observed in the responses to the film scenarios. The framing of a suburban housewife with window slats across her face, for example, in the film still from *Revolutionary Road* (Mendes, 2008), was previously interpreted in the film content analysis as connotative of the woman’s
confinement in the home in Fifties America (which is not fully conveyed in the AD). Similarly, 4 of the participants saw a bored, trapped or unhappy woman in this image, 1 of whom noticed the reflection of a suburban house in the window. In Hereafter (Eastwood, 2010) also, the camera periodically frames the main protagonist in or through doorways, which hones the spectator’s attention on his solitude. From a still of the man shot through a doorway seated alone within the small space of his kitchen (originally audio described as “he eats alone in the kitchen” (from 1:18:36)), 2 of the sighted subjects saw a lonely or isolated man, with 1 seeing someone who is considerably trapped within a confined space. Additionally, in Up in the Air (Reitman, 2009), as discussed in section 4.2, framing is often strongly connotative of a characters’ isolation, although is inconsistently audio described in this film. From a still of the young female character, who had a role in office layoffs, seated alone (both physically and psychologically) in a restricted space full of chairs, 3 of the participants saw someone lonely or on her own in this image, with 1 perceiving someone sad and trapped in a suffocating environment. During The King’s Speech (Hooper, 2011), there is also a moment where dignitaries are framed below a large ‘Way Out’ sign blocking the Duke of York’s exit prior to his public speech (not audio described); interpreted in the film analysis and by 1 participant from the AV clip in the AD audio test as an indication of ‘no escape’ for the Duke. From this film still, 4 of the sighted respondents noted the exit sign, with 1 noting that the clergyman and other men are "blocking" the way out, and another commenting that "Bertie would like to go out there, but he's got to do that speech!". The Duke’s anxiety and psychological ‘entrapment’ effected by his speech impediment are also captured in shots of him confined to one corner of the screen (a positioning that is not fully discernible from the AD). For instance, before a stretch of wall with badly flaking wallpaper, there is a sense of the character’s psychological confinement and disorientation in the unfamiliar surroundings of the speech therapist’s chambers. From this film still, each of the 5 sighted participants commented on the character’s feelings, describing him as "sad", "mortified", "unhappy", "resigned" or wanting to be left alone, which highlights the power of composition and camera focus in expressing wider concepts.

An alternative use of composition to show a character’s psychological turmoil, is in the use of mirror imagery, as shown in the film still taken from Last Chance Harvey (Hopkins, 2008). As discussed in the analysis of this imagery, Harvey avoids his reflection in the mirror (not discernible from the AD), his beige clothing merging with the colour of the tiles. This leaves an impression of a man in misery in a colourless life and with an inability to accept who he is. From this still, 1 of the sighted respondents commented that the character appeared to have "had enough", whilst 3 others remarked on the reflection, and
1 associated this with "identity issues" that the character seems to be ignoring. Additionally, in *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010) there is a technique of 'mirroring' in the use of repetition, mirrors and opposites. In the film still used, two important female characters are positioned ‘in reverse’ of each other as opposing figures (a positioning that is unclear from the AD), one of whom has a black tattoo of lilies like two wings on her back. From this, 4 of the participants mentioned the tattoo, with 1 describing the image as "bad/good. Black swan/white swan", and 2 making the denotative assumption that the girl whose face can be seen is "sad and upset" or has a lot on her mind. Alternatively, reflections can be pensive, as shown in the stylistic composition of a town reflected in the window of a train in *True Grit* (J. and E. Cohen, 2010) and across the face of a girl as she enters the place where her father was killed (an effect that is not audio described). From this still, 2 of the participants noted the reflection, with 2 describing the girl as "reflective" or "pensive". Another strong narrative sign is the reflection of a character in a wing mirror in *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005) (Stafford, 2007: 101). As outlined during the film analysis, the mirror is a symbol of thought (Cirlot, 2001: location 4940 of 9304), used here to indicate the viewer's contemplation (only partially conveyed in the AD). From a still of this imagery, 3 of the 5 sighted respondents picked up that this character was being watched in a mirror, 1 of whom described this as "voyeurism". The 2 remaining subjects described the man as unhappy, with issues, or contemplative. And although the implications of this more complex shot were not reported by the participants, similar denotative readings were made, being a first step in the generation of wider meanings of equivalent value.

Finally, an example of a more abstract and deeply intertextual and self-referential composition is seen in the monolith and apes in *Charlie & the Chocolate Factory* (Burton, 2005), which mimics Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) (a complex link that is made overly-explicit in the AD of this children's film). This is also an iconic sign in the context of Burton’s feature, where the monolith resembles a giant chocolate bar. From this film still, 2 of the 5 sighted subjects made an intertextual reference to Kubrick’s film, with 2 others interpreting the obelisk as a bar of chocolate.

To summarise, the responses to the film stills highlighted a trait towards the sighted subjects’ consolidation of different aspects of an image before making a more holistic interpretation of meaning, which was sometimes followed by the more conscious processing of connotation depending on the subjects’ relevant knowledge and experience. Where many responses were denotative, particularly during the initial listing of information, this also highlights the fact that the processing of visual imagery is less direct
than the processing of selected pieces of information given in verbal descriptions, as in
the verbal scenarios, which prompted spontaneous responses on the connotative plane.
This exercise was, therefore, useful in demonstrating the skill required in audio description
in making rapid judgements and prioritising content appropriately. Where the participants
did construe secondary levels of significance from the film stills, these corresponded to
the interpretations made during both the film content analysis and AD test, and so
reinforced these earlier findings related to the semantic, cultural, thematic and intertextual
interpretations of film texts.

To conclude, complementary to the film and AD content analysis, the primary motivation
for the semi-structured interview was to determine the value of film imagery for visually-
impaired spectators by understanding user preferences and how content of connotational
significance is conceptualised and understood. The interviewing of subjects “gives us
access to the observations of others” (Weiss, 1994: location 117 of 4574), with the
inclusion of pre-grouped questions allowing the comparison of interview data (Weiss,
1994: location 131 of 4574), as well as open questions producing more data (Weiss,
1994: location 145 of 4574). None of the participants struggled to respond to the
questions nor provided more detail than could be considered useful in a comparative
qualitative analysis, although one congenitally blind subject was unable to conceptualise
one of the nineteen scenarios (the skeletal statue in a church) and another was unable to
conceptualise two (pale clothing on a white background, and a ballerina looking at another
dancer in the mirror) even denotatively, which reflects an individual lack of experience in
the categorisation of certain forms. The participants’ responses were also generally
equivalent, although two of the visually-impaired participants (including one of the
congenitally blind individuals and one adventitiously blind subject) and one sighted subject
did provide profoundly more detail of an analytical nature in their responses, which may
be attributed to a greater interest and experience in film and their being more comfortable
with the interpretation of imagery.

What the results reinforced is that spectators of differing backgrounds and experience can
be influenced in similar ways by cultural norms and conventions in mainstream films, but,
in particular, that this is equivalent for both sighted and visually-impaired people, with
inferences and judgements based on a familiarity with the common codes of film and
language. As previously hypothesised, people with VI with unimpaired cognitive function
have an equal capacity to process mental imagery from semiotic content as sighted
people of the same ‘value’ system, or culture, through a shared use of language, and this
has been shown to be the case in this study where many instances of equivalent
associations were formed from diverse film scenarios. Moreover, whilst AD is generally enjoyed by the visually-impaired subjects, there is, equally, an openness to change, and where interest was expressed by the majority in camera techniques, framing, visual clues, intertextuality, and so on, this was felt to reflect a receptiveness to the inclusion of more sophisticated and equivalent content. The value of film imagery in verbal descriptions can, therefore, be related to the visually-impaired spectator's more equitable participation in culture, as well as to the reinforcement of traditional beliefs and practice.

It was additionally hypothesised that the processing of wider meanings from film imagery would require greater cognitive effort, which would result in wider psychological and cultural value for target audiences where this is also proposed in film AD. From the results of the semi-structured interview, the psychological, social and ideological returns from the processing of more complex or challenging content were clearly related to learning through the evaluation of concepts and development of ideas, as in 'problem solving', with the resulting knowledge and experience of value in the wider understanding of narrative and supra-narrative ideas. In this way, although general rather than more 'specialised' imagery (intertextual references, for example) may be more readily understood by the majority, the proposition of more complex or abstract ideas in AD can present valuable cognitive challenges, whilst remaining available on a denotative level for all. A new metaphor, for example, “forces" the recipient to consider its meaning (Danesi, 1999: 105).

And whilst two of the respondents thought that metaphors could be distracting if used inappropriately in AD, there was little doubt of the effectiveness of the analogies used in the verbalised scenarios, and, in fact, of that between the telegraph poles and 'crosses' in the AD of Brokeback Mountain, which was referred back to during this study. Whilst the film stills, by comparison, were less effective overall in producing spontaneous responses to the iconic and indexical content, this was felt to reflect the ‘denser' nature of visual ‘texts', where the sighted participants needed more time to select and assimilate content. These tendencies in the results show that the engagement with connotative imagery in verbal form may be more rapid and straightforward than with visual images, making it compatible with the selective nature of AD texts. Consequently, however, this also underlines the notion that visually-impaired users of film AD may sometimes be given more than is available to sighted spectators (as generally accepted by the VI participants during this study), where the focus on important content is directed. However, with the generally summarised nature of AD in short timeframes (Hyks, 2005: 6), it is inevitable that descriptions will be less detailed and so more straightforward for target audiences to process before further descriptions are heard. This is not, therefore, deemed an advantage, but simply a result of the different channel of delivery used. Moreover, in the
wider context of consecutive AD, dialogue and sounds during viewing, which requires
cognitive effort to assimilate, the VI spectator will not necessarily be conscious of every
sign form proposed and will process some of the information subconsciously, as observed
in the AD audio test.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this methodological step is that the semi-
structured approach to understanding individual processing, comprehension and
preferences in film and AD generates useful and relevant patterns of data, and, ultimately,
that verbal descriptions including signifiers of varying complexity can contribute to the
conceptualisation of figurative imagery of equivalent significance to both the original
image and the understandings of other viewers, whether sighted or visually-impaired. The
value of connotative content in AD was also equated with a general enjoyment of filmic
features, such as clues and intertextuality, as well as with cultural inclusion, social
development and learning experiences. Thus, together with the data gathered from the
film and AD content analysis and the AD testing exercise, the supplementary results from
the semi-structured interviews were able to validate the presence and meaning of semiotic
features in mainstream film, as relates to research question 1, which reflected to a certain
extent why their exclusion or incomplete capture may be inadequate in AD, as relates to
research questions 2. Most particularly, however, in response to research question 3, the
results showed that, even in verbalised form, different values can be derived from the
visual expressions of mainstream films, which contributes to the overall viewing
experience. In a more detailed consolidation of ‘value’, derived from the various
methodological steps, this question is now further addressed.

5.3. The value of visual signifiers in film AD for target users

The ‘specialist’ and cultural codes of semiotic systems (Metz, 1974: 112) enable the
formation and reading of visual constructions on deeper psychological levels. The
symbolic, for example, can be socially or ideologically evocative, advancing messages
that are meaningful for the social collective (Jung, 1964: 89; Frye, 1987: 4). As Barthes
also explains, “every Form is also a Value” (1953: 14), and so the visual signifiers of
mainstream films constitute a value system of interwoven messages expressed through
diverse methods and appreciable on various levels. The secondary level of expression is
the plane of connotation, which refers to “the socio-cultural and ‘personal’ associations
(ideological, emotional, etc.) of the sign. And interpretations are typically related to the
viewer’s class, age, gender, ethnicity and so on (Chandler, 2007: 138), meaning that
different people may appreciate different things from film imagery. However, from the
preceding comparative analyses in this chapter, it is also clear that significance assigned is not limitless within the contexts of works, as well as within the “universe of discourse” (Eco, 1979: 189), which dictates the general understanding of widely used and recognisable forms. Moreover, viewers, including visually-impaired people, might be said to gain diverse and collective “gratifications” from media sources, including, amongst other socio-psychological values, amusement, aesthetic experience, distraction, emotional release, role models, new knowledge and the reinforcement of values and beliefs (Berger, 1991: 91), as observable across the subjects’ responses to various content. The concept of value in film viewing might, thus, be broken down into the different areas of entertainment, art and emotional release, together with semantic, social and didactic experience.

5.3.1. Entertainment, art and emotional release

The popularity of certain ‘genres’ of film, the action adventure, romantic comedy, science-fiction, historical drama and psychological thriller, for example, as enjoyed by the participants and analysed in this research, illustrates the success of commercial mainstream films in the creative reuse of conventional form and plotlines. Many spectators understand the contrived nature of film construction in the manipulation of mise-en-scène, temporality, camera, lighting effects, and so on, although are able to switch off from this consciously and enjoy the temporary diversion of viewing on a purely entertainment level. However, for mainstream films to draw spectators and engage their minds agreeably, the narrative still needs to be amusing, exciting or seductive. The amusement for some spectators in the association of the St Trinian’s title images with ‘Banksy’ graffiti, for example, or, for others, in the ironical composition of an unhappy couple split by an earthquake in a supermarket floor (as observed in the semi-structured interview); as well as in the dry irony of the ‘Trespassers will be shot. Survivors will be shot again’ sign in Brokeback Mountain; the strange characterisations of Bond’s adversaries in Casino Royale; and the book pun, A Wayward Note, in Last Chance Harvey (discussed in the film content analysis); or, particularly for fans, in the fate of the red-shirted crew in Star Trek, highlights the potential value for spectators in making contextual and intertextual connections. Exciting and impactful film action can also provide heart-pounding escapism, which can be made more meaningful for audiences through visual connotation, as in character positioning or juxtaposition, such as the ominous framing in darkened doorways in Never Let Me Go (synonymous for some of the participants with reticence, entrapment, estrangement and a negative atmosphere); the dramatic cross-cutting between shots of the radio microphone and blurred images of the Duke of York in The King’s Speech.
(unclear to the participants from the AD clips, although more explicit to some of the sighted participants from the full AV clip); or the low-angled, disorientated black and white imagery at the beginning of *Casino Royale* (an effect not conveyed in the AD).

Furthermore, since challenges can be as equally “seductive” (Baudrillard, 1988: 161) as demanding, many spectators will derive pleasure from the deciphering and linking of film imagery. For example, the “semiological problems” proposed by some genres, such as the psychological thriller, can create twists and enigmas that are enjoyable for many people to solve (Berger, 1991: 102). Such problems were clearly observed in the paradigmatic features of mirrors and the monochromatic sets in *Black Swan*, which challenge reality and character identity, as identified by a number of the respondents who received the adjusted AD in the AD testing exercise, with the mirror imagery evaluated by one as “self-questioning” and “cloning”. Such signifying forms can also create motifs in the syntagmatic structure of a film, which offer links for spectators to deduce in a cohesive and drama-building experience. The appreciation of aesthetic form in itself will be an additional source of enjoyment for many spectators. And where the function of art is to express “the connotative universe” (Metz, 1974: 77), the visual appeal of mainstream film may be found in the figurative and emotive messages proposed, such as the vast mountain landscape, like an expressionist painting at the beginning of *Brokeback Mountain* (from which one of the participants made a metonymic association with character relationships, in the AD audio test); together with the fantasy, flashback environments of *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*; the long, misty pathway through Regents Park in *The King’s Speech*; the choreographed journey to work in *Revolutionary Road*; and the historic sites of London in *Last Chance Harvey*, each of which is cinematographically creative and rich in meaning.

As sentient beings, opportunities for emotional release, as might be occasioned in film viewing, are of further value in the regulation of human thought and feelings and in the understanding and exploration of new concepts, theoretical situations, issues, stress, moral dilemmas, memories, relationships, and so on. The activation and understanding of our emotions could, for example, be motivated by connotational imagery such as the tender attention to the daughter’s jumper and lover’s shirt in *Brokeback Mountain*, which were significant for the majority of the participants during the AD test. Further examples include the hummingbird motif in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, as an uplifting symbol of the soul’s departure; the tattered litter snared on a barbed wire fence in *Never Let Me Go*, as a symbolic reminder of lost friends; and the closed door of the gas chamber
at the end of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, as a dark symbol of man’s unspeakable inhumanity.

Finally, although product placement (the signs of advertising) is not always favoured by the spectators of mainstream film due to its designs on audiences as consumers (where media’s “manipulation of the masses” (Baudrillard, 1988: 218) is a point of contention for some, including 50% of the research participants, of whom the majority are sighted), others do actually enjoy the “comedy value”, excitement or seduction engendered by this content as part of the overall viewing experience (including 80% of the visually-impaired subjects interviewed).

What the above values mean in terms of audio description is that the inclusion of equivalent forms that aim, where relevant, for humour or tension building or which serve to ‘seduce’ the target audience in different ways, can encourage the processing of and response to film imagery on a variety of levels, although where a spectator fails to capture the deeper message, an image may still be understood denotatively (Mitry, 2000: 346). Conversely, the exclusion of these aspects of film construction offers the target users of AD much less to consider, experience and enjoy.

### 5.3.2. Semantic, social and didactic experience

The value of visual imagery in AD can also be related to the ability of language to signify. Language is a representation of how we see and understand the world (Danesi, 1999: 69) and our perception is categorised in “specific cultural contexts” (Danesi, 1999: 25). Conversely, the “perception-structuring system of signification” also facilitates individual thinking in our personal search for knowledge (Danesi, 1999: 45). The visual representations of film may, therefore, help to validate our social values and beliefs (Berger, 1991: 84), as well as satisfy the inherent human need to explore meanings beyond our life experiences (Danesi, 1999: 122). Character dialogue is, thus, only one way in which stories and themes are expressed in films, and it is often through visual imagery that deeper, more implicit communication takes place. Themes of time, memory, innocence, maturity, death, revenge, trust, prejudice, loneliness, and so on, are each expressed visually in mainstream films. As Phillips (2000: 1) states:

> We want to share impressions, sort out our own reactions, debate what happened and what it all meant, and then make some sort of judgment. This social, negotiated response is one of the pleasures provided by the cinematic experience.
As outlined in section 2.1.2, the “cultural norm” of what is understood by the majority (Nida, 1964: 53), or the “social, negotiated response” (Phillips, 2000:1), is actually sought out by the producers of mass entertainment to enable their works to be understood by a wide audience base. However, this does not mean that mainstream films are simple or unintelligent in construction, as many are original in their use of cinematographic technique, their adaptation of scripts, literary works and historical events, and in the visual ‘dialogue’ in which they engage with antecedent texts. The light and dark cowboy hats in Brokeback Mountain, for example, is a subversion of the traditional sign of good and bad characters in westerns (a concept corroborated by their association with opposing natures by all of the participants in the film scenario section of the interview). The resulting works are a layering of messages related to a story’s themes, as well as to wider social, historical, political and existential ideas. Where “knowledge is social” (Berger, 1991: 34), these messages contribute to our social adhesion and identities, through the production of ideology (Berger, 1991: 18), for example, and in characterisations that provide us with role models (Berger, 1991: 47). Most notably, the concept of adhesion can be equated with the degree of equivalence in the responses across each of the methodological stages. However, although it is understood that media can be socially educational (Berger, 1991: 82), for visual constructions to be meaningful, a coded and recognisable, or “differential physical feature”, must be present (Danesi, 1999: 43). For example, the extinguished candle between secretive friends in The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, as discussed in the film content analysis, is synonymous with their shame in discovery, as opposed to the film scenario of a lighted candle between two people, which was idealistically associated with romance or intimacy by the majority of the participants. The meanings generated from intertextual connections also, are based on the logic that: “No text is read independently of the reader’s experience of other texts” (Eco, 1979: 21), which was also reflected in the participants’ various intertextual linking of imagery. Metaphors too can generate meaning and, in turn, culture (Eco, 1979: 87), although this is a circular phenomenon where the deduction of metaphor is based upon preexisting knowledge or convention (as in the metaphor of a trapped housewife, framed behind the ‘bars’ of a window in the scenario from Revolutionary Road, whom 60% of the participants felt to be oppressed in some way).

Moreover, people use symbolism to stand for things that they cannot fully understand (Jung, 1964: 21), which means that “semiotics is not about the ‘real’ world at all, but about complementary or alternative actual models of it” (Sebeok, 1994: 4) that people can safely use to explore their thoughts and feelings both consciously and subconsciously. This was confirmed in the AD audio test and film scenario section of the semi-structured interview
where explorations were made by the subjects in response to iconography; cross shapes in particular. Additionally, there is “a collective demand for signs of power” (Baudrillard, 1988: 180), such as flags and emblems and demonstrations of strong human behaviour, which can be socially unifying, shaping and inspiring (as represented in the iconic image of flag raising on IowA Jima, associated by all of the sighted participants from the film still with victorious or patriotic behaviour). But, equally, the signs of power can represent conflict or destructive ideology, such as the swastikas and stone eagle in The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, which may have contributed to the sense of foreboding and entrapment picked up by a number of the participants in the AD test.

From the testing and interviewing of different respondents, it is clear that some people (both sighted and visually-impaired) think very deeply about the significance of film imagery and the possible connections that might be made diegetically and in wider socio-cultural terms. The cognitive effort required to link and understand these forms is also of value in terms of skills development, such as in making decisions. The visualisation and significance of looking in the mirror, however, might pose difficulty for some people with congenital blindness due to the opposing points of focus to be processed simultaneously, which makes the physical state of reflected subjects more abstract without memory of this experience. Similarly, the imagining of colourless environments may be difficult for some visually-impaired spectators where there are no defining points of reference to conceptualise. Despite these anomalies picked up in the film AD test and film scenario section, however, there seems obvious didactic and cultural value in the provision of semiotic content in film AD. This is related to the wider opportunities for target users to conceptualise, interpret and associate ideas, as well as to the notion in terms of equivalence that there is a link between conformism and fulfilment (Baudrillard, 1988: 37), equated in this respect to the social gratification that may be attained from an equitable inclusion in film culture.

5.4. Conclusion

In summary, people are “constantly seeking stories (in the movies, on television programs, in novels) not only to be entertained, but also to gain insights into the mysteries of life” (Danesi, 1999: 114). Such things as films, television and literature “feed our unconscious lives” (Berger, 1991: 59) and ultimately contribute to the shape of our thoughts and responses. The equitable treatment and integration of filmic elements in AD practice affords visually-impaired spectators the same values of escapism, emotional
release, new knowledge, role models and the reinforcement of personal ideals and social norms. As such, inconsistencies are as equally likely to be excluding or limited in scope.

As found in the film and AD content analysis, visual constructions are an inherent part of mainstream films, but are not always handled appropriately in film AD. The different aspects of genre, mise-en-scène, camera techniques and montage, as supported by soundtrack elements, provide opportunities to form cultural, thematic and intertextual meanings that add deeper meaning to film narrative. Considering the types of figurative visual constructions found in this earlier analysis, it was expected that brief and straightforward descriptions of distinct and contrasting signifiers would express connotative messages to the participants. And where normally absorbed subconsciously during viewing, that the isolation of semiotic content from other narrative elements, in short extracts of audio, verbal scenarios and film stills, would encourage a more conscious response to this so that significance might be better understood. Of course, the verbal description of imagery could be considered much less effective at subtly conveying irony, clues, emotive situations, visual metaphors, and so on. However, as observed in the results of the AD test and from the film scenarios in the semi-structured interview, verbal descriptions can generate mental pictures of comparable significance to the original image: the ‘bars’ of the balusters separating the boy from his family in The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, for example, from which some of the respondents felt sadness and isolation in the situation, and the cross-shaped telegraph poles in Brokeback Mountain, which some felt to be an ominous and foreboding religious metaphor. The results from the qualitative testing of AD versions and the semi-structured interviewing of respondents, thus, demonstrated the importance of signifying form to the expression of meaning in film and how its inclusion in verbal descriptions in straightforward terms can make a difference to spectator response and the appreciation of content other than on the basis of ‘first level story’.
6. Conclusions

Building on academic research in audio description, a relatively new field in audio visual translation, this research investigated qualitative principles in the transfer of visual signifiers in mainstream films to the verbal mode of AD, together with the processing and understanding of semiotic constructions by visually-impaired target users. The underlying hypothesis was that semiotics is an integral part of filmmaking and, consequently, that the inclusion of sign forms in the language of film AD would constitute an equivalence in translation that would provide visually-impaired audiences with corresponding processing opportunities to those available to sighted audiences. As stated previously, this is an issue of both quality and equality since a descriptive service for film that does not acknowledge the stylistic, technical and structural features of film content could be considered incomplete or exclusive. Due to issues highlighted in the introduction and theoretical framework, such as the lack of guidelines and regulatory control of film AD in the UK; the inherent limitations in visual to verbal transfer (including incompatibilities between these different sign systems and the technical limitations of AD); the diversity of audience make-up; and lack of input from filmmakers and of agreed models in AD transfer, this study raised the question of whether there is scope in film AD for the inclusion and comprehension of semiotic elements. The research questions that structured investigation in these areas sought to understand visual expression in mainstream filmmaking and the implications of this for AD practice and target users, namely: (i) “What visual forms are important to connotational significance in mainstream films and how can they be understood?”, (ii) “Do AD texts attend to these forms appropriately?”, and (iii) “What value does the audio description of visual imagery have for target users?”. This chapter provides a summary of the research outcomes, commencing with a response to these questions (6.1), followed by the contributions of this study to theory, policy and practice (6.2), the limitations of this research (6.3) and suggested areas for further investigation (6.4).

6.1. Summary of responses to the research questions

In view of the issues identified at the outset of this study, the aim of this research was to verify what visual forms are important to secondary (connotational) significance in mainstream films, whether these are appropriately handled in film AD, and whether such content holds value for visually-impaired spectators. The substantive frame of the research methodology designed to respond to these questions (see chapter 3) was qualitative, beginning with a stage of film and AD content analysis to build an understanding of what film signs are and how they are currently represented in AD,
followed by a small complementary study testing different AD versions and the semi-structured interviewing of participants to appreciate the comprehension and value of imagery from a spectator’s perspective. Thus, these methodological steps sought to analyse, classify and test the semiotic content of audio described films, with the resulting data key to the understanding of whether content of second-level significance can be feasibly reproduced in film AD to the benefit of target users. An outline of the research outcomes in relation to each of the research questions is given below.

(i) What visual forms are important to connotational significance in mainstream films and how can they be understood?

In exploring the connotational propositions of mainstream film imagery and seeking to understand their significance, this study began with a review of semiotics and film theory before carrying out a qualitative analysis of film content. The generally accepted principle in modern semiotic theory is that a sign consists of a signifier plus a signified and finds significance in the shared understanding of coded form in language and cultural contexts. In film studies also, it is accepted that messages can be expressed visually through signs, as in this research, where signifying content was found to consist of diverse connotational elements (as transmitted through character behaviour, the personification of objects, reflections, effects of lighting, framing and environments, for example), which could, in turn, be classified under the general headings of film construction: genre, mise-en-scène, camera techniques and montage, as supported by the classification of supporting signifiers under music and sounds. On the basis of these understandings, the qualitative analysis of 10 mainstream films revealed that important forms of second-level significance are tied in with the aesthetics of film and that, although different style and form was evident in the work of individual filmmakers, the nature of connotative imagery was largely found to correspond to Peirce’s classification of signs under the iconic, indexical and/or symbolic (although the terms ‘symbolic’ and ‘symbolism’ were used in this research to refer to more abstract signs of ideological significance, rather than Peirce’s arbitrary ‘symbol’), within a general framework of conventional technique, common themes and plotlines.

The expressive nature of visual imagery was also found to depend upon the paradigmatic differentiation of signifiers in various contexts, as well as to their relationships with other signifiers in the syntagmatic structure of a narrative, in culture, history and antecedent texts. The distinctive image of two desolate, ‘mirrored’ hallways in the romantic comedy Last Chance Harvey (Hopkins, 2008), for example, was understood in the film content
analysis to emphasise the main character's estrangement and an obscurity of direction in his life. This visual composition was also found to link with other mirrored imagery in a visual motif that called his sense of identity into question, and, on an intertextual level, to the labyrinthine hotel corridors in Kubrick's horror, *The Shining* (1980), which deeply and visually explore character psychology. Aesthetic connotation has also been seen to be more emphatic in some mainstream films, such as *Black Swan*, which draws attention to its own nature as constructed medium, whilst presenting the confused psychological identity of the main character. But, although intentional, prolific and identifiable, the expressive content of the films studied was generally less explicit overall, so as to realistically blend with the story.

Once the signifiers of connotational significance were identified in this study, it was additionally important to understand how these forms might be understood, both for the purpose of assigning importance to them in the hierarchising of potential elements for transfer in audio description, as well as in evaluating their potential value for spectators. Films communicate many of their themes and messages visually through the articulations of actors, action, environmental composition, and so on. It is clear, however, that there is no singular approach in film studies to comprehending form (Lehman and Luhr, 1999 referenced by Orero, 2012: 16), particularly since meaning is often built up covertly for audiences as a feature progresses (Mitry, 2000: 336). Within this, the films studied were found to signify through the common “temporal and spatial arrangement of elements” (Merleau-Ponty referenced by Metz, 1974: 43), with significance, therefore, reliant on context. The visual metaphor, for example, was found to express meaning by way of analogy, such as in the resemblance to bars of vertical or horizontal features positioned in front of characters in an iconic representation of psychological or social confinement. Moreover, although form and meaning cannot be divorced from each other (Kress, 2003: 37), these aspects of the sign are inevitably reliant on the receiver’s prior experience of similar or related forms and concepts to make sense, such as the close-up and framing in mainstream films, which were observed to focus attention on character emotions and subjects of interest in different situations, respectively.

Despite the general subtlety of connotational imagery and artistic variations found in semiotic usage, it was also confirmed in the different methodological stages that much of the sign-making of mainstream films is “easily acquired” (Bordwell, 1996a: 95), including by visually-impaired spectators, being easily recognisable and interpretable from the common cultural codes in operation, including those of film and social culture. In this way, the signifying codes in evidence were found to be largely ‘unrestricted’ so as to be
accessible to a mass market of film consumers. However, the understanding of signs in multimodal media can involve more complex interpretation (Baldry and Thibault, 2005: 26) as, in addition to the “cultural codes” of the semiotic system there are more “specialized”, socially “restricted” codes (Metz, 1974: 112). This was in evidence in the film content reviewed, some of which was later tested to verify levels of comprehension. The understanding of the iconic and indexical ‘red shirt’ referent in Star Trek (Abrams, 2009), for example, might be easily interpreted and enjoyed by fans of the series whilst remaining inaccessible and denotative to those without knowledge of the ‘code’ wherein personnel in red uniforms from the starship Enterprise often die during missions (a tradition continued by the director, J.J. Abrams, in the 2009 remake of this film). With some of the signifying constructions being undoubtedly more ‘specialised’, profound or abstract than others, the meaning of these was less easily inferred by the participants where referenced in the AD test and semi-structured interview, although the participants also added some of their own intertextual references in response to various signifiers. However, with a general experience of mainstream film and visual culture, the identification and ‘reading’ of sign forms was largely found to be straightforward, even though much of this may normally be absorbed subconsciously during viewing. Alongside the comprehension of connotational imagery in this research, it also needed to be understood whether important visual signifiers are appropriately transferred by audio describers in a systematic handling of visual expression.

(ii) Do AD texts attend to these forms appropriately?

Whilst many visual constructions important to connotational meaning were observed in the AD analysed, some of which resulted from the straightforward denotative description of action, the inclusion of semiotic content was observed to be widely inconsistent, with many opportunities missed for the transference of important imagery, together with inconsequential features of ‘first level story’ described in place of more symbolic or abstract expression. These inconsistencies were seen to occur across each of the different genres, post-production agencies and audio describers, and were rarely found to be related to time constraints in the soundtrack.

The function of AD is sometimes understood as a “commentary” (Munday, 2008: 185), implying the recounting of consecutive events in a story, which allows little scope for the inclusion of more ‘static’ paradigmatic features and the linking of visual motif across the syntagmatic structure of narrative. In this respect, and in line with Salway’s findings (2007) in the quantitative analysis of film AD (referred to in sections 1.2 and 2.2.2), a strong
preference was found in the data towards the description of action, temporality and character appearance, with the marginalisation of other types of content. Salway defines the language choices in film AD as “important narrative elements for story-telling” (Salway, Vassiliou and Ahmad, 2005 referenced by Salway, 2007: 163), and, in fairness, many elements of ‘story’ that could be interpreted connotatively in addition to their explicit, primary meanings, were available in the AD texts analysed (the action along corridors, pathways and roads in Never Let Me Go, for example, and the care taken with articles of clothing in the final scene of Brokeback Mountain). However, where film narrative was found to comprise much more than just “fabula” of “first level story” (Eco, 1979: 27–28), the weighting in film AD towards events of ‘first-level’ significance was considered a lack in translation. This includes the uneven handling of imagery throughout a feature, such as visual motifs, which causes a loss of style and structure. The inclusion of brand name products, the signs of advertising, was also found to be inconsistent in the film AD, despite a possible interest in this (expressed by the majority of the VI respondents in the semi-structured interviews). There are no specific guidelines in respect of the inclusion of brand names in film AD, although Ofcom asks broadcasters to consider the contractual implications of product placement in TV programmes (2000: 34), whilst not allowing this to “intrude” (2010: 15). However, aside from where this was seen to directly contribute to what a filmmaker may be trying to address in the narrative, as in Up in the Air in which brand loyalty is a central theme, the omission of these signifiers from film AD was generally deemed appropriate.

Furthermore, there is a justifiable requirement for film AD to be clear and unobtrusive so as to be easily absorbed during viewing, which motivates the production of short, uncomplicated texts. Whilst the ‘consumption’ of AV translations in “real time”, which may excuse any absence of detail (Hatim and Mason, 1997: 444), is accepted, the results of this research would suggest that the expression of wider concepts of varying degrees of complexity can be successfully included in film AD using succinct and straightforward language (the AD of Benjamin’s father “half-hidden in shadow” in The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, for example, or framing of Bingham in “one of a row of tall windows in the nondescript hotel block” in Up in the Air). Despite multiple examples in the results of the film and AD content analysis of appropriate verbal constructions that might lead to a greater conceptualisation of themes and ideas on the part of VI spectators (as validated during the AD test to a certain extent where included in the original AD), methods were, again, inconsistent, with missing details (colours and positioning, for example) weakening the perception or effect of images, and odd or ineffective language choices inappropriately altering the source messages.
In summary, whilst more sophisticated forms of AD are sometimes attempted in the
description of mainstream films, there is a high degree of inconsistency in this area, with
the omission of important signifiers, together with incomplete or inappropriate descriptions
common. This situation conflicts with concepts of quality in audio-visual translation and
the notion of an equitable distribution of information for all: in short, with the value of film
AD for AD users.

(iii) What value does the audio description of visual imagery have for target users?

It is understood from theories on cognition and visual impairment (see section 2.1.3) that,
despite differing access needs, people with VI of intact cognitive function are as able as
sighted people to build mental pictures from film imagery and make equivalent interpretations. This is due to a shared knowledge of conventions in filmmaking and the
codes of language and culture. This theory was subsequently supported in the AD test
and semi-structured interview where patterns of equivalent data were observed across the
visually-impaired and sighted subjects’ response to diverse semiotic content, whilst there
was still scope for the individual exploration of meaning. Moreover, the significance
derived from film imagery, together with the act of processing itself, was found to relate to
the value of signifying imagery for spectators, as might also be derived from film AD
where appropriately included in these texts.

In this respect, many of the responses in the AD test and semi-structured interviews
revealed more than a denotative comprehension of film imagery, and there was evidence
of socio-psychological value in the range of mental associations and analogies that could
be made from signifying form. Stories can be entertaining, but they can also help people
to discover wider meaning in life (Danesi, 1999: 114). In this way, the participants’
responses were insightful of their exploration of meaning on deeper and wider levels, as
well as in the reinforcement of existing cultural beliefs and conventions. The response to
colour ‘codification’, for example, is culturally ‘conditioned’ (Danesi, 1999: 76), as is the
response to other types of codified usage, such as the association of flag raising with
patriotism and victory. The ‘seduction’ of the cognitive challenges proposed by the
signifying content in the AD test and semi-structured interview was also evident from the
participants’ satisfaction and enjoyment in deducing the ‘answers’. In this respect, the
verbalisation of film imagery was considered to have a stimulating effect on the
participants’ perceptions, enabling them to make judgements and understand a diverse
range of content. Whilst the value of emotional release from the processing of such
content, in allowing the regulation of thoughts and feelings and the examination of
different situations, was not directly understood from the feedback to imagery in the AD test and semi-structured interview, this was appreciable, to a certain extent, from the psychological influence of imagery noted in the participants’ responses. Thus, signs were shown to conform to the need of the collective to understand the world, with the signifieds of connotation closely ‘communicating’ with social culture and experiences (Barthes, 1953: 151), which assisted semantic and psychological understanding for both the sighted and visually-impaired subjects.

Where the significance assigned to semiotic content was shown to be widely equivalent and of diverse value, this has implications for the more systematic inclusion of visual imagery in film AD, not least, in the equitable treatment of visually-impaired audiences. The omission or incomplete capture of important signifying form, as well as erroneous referents and overly-explicit imagery in film AD, conversely results in a loss of opportunities for target users to gain value from the films they consume.

6.2. Contribution of the study

Research studies aim to provide hitherto unknown answers to particular questions (Weiss, 1994: location 381 of 4574). With the context of this study being film AD, a growing media access service for blind and visually-impaired people, the overarching questions of research stemmed from a need to understand whether the important, expressive features of mainstream films are transferred in AD texts, and the potential value of this for visually-impaired audiences beyond the basic understanding of film stories. In this respect, semiotic analysis and film theory helped in the determination of important visual features, with traditional rules in translation assisting in the evaluation of AD texts for appropriateness. In the qualitative approach to spectator perception and the understanding of visual to verbal transfer in film AD, this research makes an original contribution to academic theory in AV translation, which lacks qualitative methodological studies in the analysis and reception of AD. Film and semiotic theory also lacks studies in respect of how visual imagery may be understood in the absence of sight. By producing relevant qualitative data in these areas, this research, in turn, contributes to notions of equitability in disability studies. Moreover, in terms of quality and an understanding of how the more inclusive access to content is of value to AD users, this study makes a novel contribution to professional practice in AD production in the UK, which although may include quality checks before the final recording of a script, has no time for an in-depth qualitative analysis. The implications of the research outcomes for theory (6.2.1) and for policy and practice (6.2.2), are outlined below.
6.2.1. Implications for theory

An exploration of the hypothesis that film imagery is intentionally meaningful and that the inclusion of signifying form in film AD may provide equivalent value for visually-impaired audiences, required an understanding of theoretical literature across multiple disciplines, including semiotics, film studies and translation theory, as well as theoretical perspectives in visual impairment and current AD practice (see chapter 2). In building an appreciation of connotational form in mainstream films, of how semiotic content is currently represented in film AD, and of audience perception and viewing preferences, this study sought to fill the gaps found in the existing literature, which stemmed from a general lack of qualitative investigation into the intra-modality of film AD and how audio descriptions are processed by target users.

Signs are central to our mental and communication processes (Sebeok, 1994: xi), essential to social cohesion, and integral to language and culture, including for the visually-impaired people in society, yet theory in relation to the semiotic systems of film lacks analysis in terms of visual impairment. Modern semiotic theory informs us of the *signifier* and the *signified* (see Saussure, 1959: 66; and Barthes, 1953: 104), of codes and context, and the physical, cultural and temporal “motivations” of signs (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 217). Yet this is often from a visual perspective, with Peirce’s model, for example, requiring the linkage of form to external ‘objects’ (Chandler, 2007: 29; Kress, 2003: 41) through physical resemblance, association and/or learned convention (Berger, 2011: 53). So, although the psychological aspect of the *signified* is acknowledged (see Saussure, 1959: 11; and Barthes, 1953: 114) and the signifiers of sound (in the metaphors of speech, sound effects and music, for example) are encompassed in the works of some theorists (see Barthes, 1977, and Eco, 1979), the understanding of signs is rarely divorced from the actual “thing” represented (Barthes, 1953: 114). In the absence of sight and visual experience of certain objects and phenomena, it was, therefore, unclear how visual signs could *signify* to visually-impaired people. Thus, looking at semiotics in the broader context of visual impairment, based on Saussure’s understanding of the “psychological” character of the linguistic sign (1959: 11), this research makes an original contribution to semiotics, highlighting values that can be derived from a purely mental appreciation of connotation.

It was additionally reinforced in the results of this study that sign-making is prevalent in mainstream films, manifesting itself in different ways through technical composition, cultural icons and indexes, graphics, music, self-reflexivity, intertextuality, and so on, with
the potential to communicate non-literal meanings to audiences in various contexts (see the qualitative analysis in chapter 4). Although this understanding is not original, with numerous works on visual construction and the interpretation of imagery already available (see Barthes, 1977; Metz, 1974; Eco, 1979; Berger, 1991; Bordwell, 1996 (a); Bordwell, 1996 (b); Leibowitz, 1997; Turvey, 1997; Walton, 1997; Danesi, 1999; Hayward, 2000; Phillips, 2000; Bignell, 2002; Kress, 2003; Chaume, 2004; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Chandler, 2007; Stafford, 2007; Lehman and Luhr, 2008; Monaco, 2009; Mitry, 2000), the originality of the present work is in its approach to visual construction and meaning-making in mainstream film from the perspective of visual impairment and the equitable treatment of visually-impaired spectators. Moreover, it was reinforced in the data that film signifiers are often ‘obvious’, as argued by Barthes (1977: 56) and that film codes are “easily acquired” (Bordwell 1996a: 95) through the use of conventional techniques (some of which are subverted in less traditional narrative form). But, in this research, it was also shown that the signifiers and codes of mainstream films could be understood in equivalent and straightforward ways by visually-impaired spectators, expanding upon Piety’s notion that people with VI belong to the same “speech community” as sighted people (2004) and, from traditional translation theory, that there is “a wide measure of agreement in the use of words” (Nida, 1964: 48). Finally, this study revealed that the signifiers of film soundtracks are unreliable in transmitting clear messages without the ‘anchoring effect’ of other content (Mitry, 2000: 249). Moreover, and contrary to Smith’s understanding of the subordination of sound in film viewing (1996: 230), it was found that film music is not rendered “inaudible” in film AD, and can trigger emotions, affect interpretation and contribute to the ‘intertextual’ appreciation of soundtracks (where similarities between film scores are found), with audio levels often overpowering to spectators.

Furthermore, this research provided a sound basis on which film narrative might be compared with language through the verbal communication of visual imagery in AD in cohesion with dialogue, music and sounds. The notion that film narrative acts like language (see Stafford, 2007; Mitry, 2000), wherein “the image plays the part of both speech and word through its symbolic and logical properties and its attributes as a potential sign” (Mitry, 2000: 15), is a subject of debate amongst theorists. Particularly where images are dynamic in comparison to words (Mitry, 2000: 40). The “linguistic message” produced in the interpretation of AV media (Barthes, 1953: 78), as extensively analysed in this research, is, though, a manifestation of visual imagery in language, and, as such, contributes to the study of film narrative as text, with its own signs, grammar and conventions. And although there can never be true “formal equivalence between film
language and actual language, there is at least the similarity that they both have access to meaning through the use of signs or symbols” (Mitry, 2000: 370).

The non-traditional nature of AD translation, being visual to verbal transfer, and the relative newness of this practice compared to more traditional forms of translation, means that academic writing is limited in this area. This research furthers understandings in multimodal transfer, contributing to a greater awareness concerning the audio description of film. Of the theories available in AD, Piety (2004), Haig (2006), Greening and Rolph (2007), Vercauteren (2007), Holland (2009), Finbow (2010), Kruger (2010) and Orero (2012) seem to be in agreement that more could be achieved in the visual to verbal transfer of film imagery in a more informed, creative and subjective description of organised onscreen space. There is no known qualitative data supporting these theories, however, and the alternative methods proposed, including the more literary form of audio narration (see Finbow, 2010; and Kruger, 2010) or the audio description of “stimuli” as opposed to “information” (see Udo and Fels, 2010) may be more complex or offer the target audience quite different viewing experiences. In the present research, the most appropriate form of transfer was found to be a “source-orientated” (Nida, 1964: 165) model of formal equivalence, wherein originating form and meanings are retained, as opposed to more ‘dynamic’ forms of translation in which texts are adjusted to fit within different receiving cultures. Although some theorists believe that F-E may not be the most flexible or creative method of translation (see Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995: 86–87), it was found to be appropriate in the English AD of English language films, since it would be inappropriate to adjust the content shown on screen. In this respect, the straightforward inclusion of linguistic content such as metaphor and metonymy in film AD, was shown to help in the creation of equivalent meanings and structure for AD users.

Whilst strongly demonstrating a requirement for the more systematic inclusion of signifying content in film AD (such as the symbolic effect of framing, meaningful use of colour and light, etc.), this study also reinforced the need for plain and natural language, as firmly embedded in the traditional rules of translation. In this respect, it was demonstrated through diverse examples from different genres, directors, post-production agencies and audio describers, that the connotative content of mainstream films can be simply and succinctly integrated with the denotative content of ‘first-level story’ for a fuller and more equitable experience. This was also shown to be achievable through a sound, general knowledge of film construction (as source text material) and with little adjustment to the content of current AD texts. No reason was, therefore, found for overly-simplistic methods in film AD that are less faithful to the original product.
Finally, Chaume suggested that film studies should draw upon translation in the analysis of film (referenced by Munday, 2008: 188), since translation theory can provide additional models for the analysis of these ‘texts’ (Chaume, 2004: online). This research extended upon this in a cross-disciplinary model of analysis that looked at cinematic construction from the perspectives of semiotics, film theory and translation studies, and in relation to the creative description of visual form for people with visual impairment. The qualitative analysis and reception of audio described films also enforced theories in disability studies in relation to ‘equitable use’ and advanced new data concerning the processing of media content with a greater focus on the VI user. The lack of non-visual perspectives in the fields of semiotics and film studies in particular, reinforced the need for this work in a more inclusive academic approach to film analysis, at the same time providing a new avenue for the study of film and language. It must, though, be said that the most ideal theoretical principles do not always conform to the demands of practice (Saussure, 1959: 98), so it is also essential to address the implications of the research outcomes in the ‘real world’ context of media industry production.

6.2.2. Implications for policy and practice

Audio description in the UK commenced less than two decades ago partly in response to anti-discrimination legislation, and feedback to the RNIB would seem to indicate that this service greatly enhances the lives of visually-impaired people (Greening and Rolph, 2007: 127) through the increased access to programmes that would not be understandable from dialogue and sounds alone. However, the equitable treatment of visually-impaired spectators concerns more than the availability of AD, but also the quality of content conveyed.

According to Chmiel and Mazur: “Reception studies in AD can directly contribute to the quality of audio description” (2012: 58), particularly where industry does not itself have time to carry out academic research (Chaume, 2004: online), with analysis allowing media professionals to be “self-critical” and see what works most effectively (Berger, 1991: 134). In this way, the results of this research, which revealed that an appreciable amount of visual imagery identified as important to connotational significance, is not always included in film AD, have implications for the way in which film AD is currently approached by audio describers. Not least, that film AD texts may be enhanced through an increased awareness of film and translation theory and an improvement in the conditions in which it is currently produced.
The way in which the visual imagery of popular film might be ‘read’ is arguably straightforward, as shown in the course of this work, meaning that there is little justification for the lack of signifying content in film AD, particularly where visual form of expressive potential beyond the simplistic reading of a story might be equitably and briefly expressed in words. Naturally, individual audio describers will produce AD texts of different style and form, stemming partly from the individual interpretation involved in the analysis of semiotic content (Chandler, 2007: 221). However, the interpretation of film imagery, which is believed to be generally “obvious” through the differentiation of content (Barthes, 1977: 56), is not limitless, as reinforced by the high level of equivalence found in the participants’ responses, which also supported findings in the film and AD content analysis. The extensive comparison of visual imagery to AD also highlighted how the AD of important visual signifiers is possible within short soundtrack timeframes. And whilst this means that audio describers will need to ‘describe what they see’, as advised by the advocates of objective audio description, which is consistent with an F-E translation of a work’s original features, the notion of objectivity is a rather idealistic one, since audio describers will inevitably be influenced by personal experience and perception. Rather, what is shown on screen needs to be subjectively judged by audio describers in order for different types of content to be prioritised in a balanced approach to film narrative.

Based on an understanding of how AD is produced in post-production agencies, as discussed in section 2.2, the underlying causes of inconsistent image transfer may be related to a lack of training or experience in this field, insufficient time to produce texts, a lack of guidance notes, inadequate film prints, or an inadequate level of collaboration with visually-impaired people (although a study of AD practice in-situ would be needed to verify the exact reasons for this qualitative problem). From the results of this research, it was obvious that a greater awareness of the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of filmmaking in AD production could contribute to increased opportunities for meaning-making from AD texts, in that decisions that are well-informed could enhance the depth of descriptions produced. Contrary to what Kruger implies, however, “a description of the filmic WHAT” (2010: 246), which he believes ineffective in the transfer of film narrative, may be all that is legitimately available to the audio describers of mainstream films. This is because a greater level of technical language (the ‘hows’ of image construction) than is presently included (such as framing and fading to black, which can be translated in straightforward, diegetic terms), or the explicit description of sign function or significance (the ‘whys’ of image construction), would detract from the spectator’s immersion in a story. At the same time, it is accepted that wider and more profound conceptualisations cannot be formed from AD without the periodic and appropriate inclusion of imagery pertaining to secondary levels of meaning (a
black hat and a white hat, for example, rather than the general description of hats; the positioning of a lighted candle between two people and its extinguishing when they are discovered; reflections and mirroring; barriers; pathways, doorways and windows; the repetition of motif, and so on). It should be noted that there is already an element of the diegetic 'hows' in the structure of AD, in descriptions of how characters move and objects look, for example, but, as an integral part of the action, this is a justified aspect of image transfer that in no way compromises a VI spectator's equitable engagement with the narrative.

As previously, the ideal audio describer, like the translator, requires a person skilled in the comprehension of a source text, knowledgeable in the subject and concerned with the intention of a work (Nida, 1964: 153) (see section 2.2.3). According to Kress and van Leeuwen, “Any semiotic mode has to be able to project the relations between the producer of a (complex) sign, and the receiver/reproducer of that sign” (2006: 42). This means that knowledge of a film is preferable before attempting AD so that meanings and the motivations of filmmakers might be better conveyed (Holland, 2009: 173–174). In traditional forms of translation, it is not uncommon for practitioners to be given supplementary notes, which help in the production of correspondence in style and meaning in the target text (Nida, 1964: 156). But, whereas the literary author may be able to work closely with his/her translator, so ambiguities may be clarified and the “re-coded” version may be validated (Hawkes, 1977:104), audio describers are unlikely to collaborate with filmmakers and may only receive copies of the scripts with the film prints, which are sometimes out of date (Greening, 2013: personal communication). Original scripts are also only partially useful, because although they are adapted visually in the production of mainstream films, these written texts are much denser than the language of audio description allows and do not allow gaps for AD. Again, the intersemiotic transmutation of visual imagery to the verbal mode of speech is only a partial translation despite the same cultural considerations imposed on the work. But ‘loss’ and ‘gain’ is inevitable in translation (Eco, 2003: 32-61), with differences resulting from a condensation of the original material (Hatim and Mason, 1997: 430-431) or other adjustments needed to make the material fit into the receiving system (Shavit, 1981: 173), as well as from the degree of cultural and temporal separation between author and translator (or, in the case of film AD, between filmmakers and audio describers). Whilst translation rules might be generally adapted in film AD, it should, therefore, be borne in mind that transfer is both partial and intersemiotic, so not all of the traditional rules of translation will apply.
As previously discussed in section 2.2.1, although existing guidelines are sometimes dismissed in the call for more interpretative forms of film AD (see Orero, 2012: 25; Finbow, 2010: 227), UK guidelines were predominantly written for television access, despite the inclusion of sound general advice. Professionals may, therefore, benefit from principles more directly related to film, as arose in the film and AD content analysis of this research. In AD for television, broadcasters are obliged to make sure that practitioners are “trained in techniques to describe the significance of images for the benefit of the blind and partially-sighted audience” (Ofcom, 2010: 4). But, whilst it can be argued that it is not the “significance of images” that must be described, but rather images of significance to a programme, the notion that audio describers should be appropriately trained in the reading and transfer of images for audiences with particular needs is a fundamental consideration in film AD also. Furthermore, where it is recommended that broadcasters of audio described programmes “seek advice from disability groups about how best to maximise the benefits to the blind and those with visual impairments” (Ofcom, 2010: 7), advice might also be sought from consultation groups in the production of film AD since the quality of film viewing for persons with visual impairment is of no less importance. The tailoring of access services to individual users is not viable, but general rules in the production of AD for different types of media might be established through consultation with a cross-section of users representing the majority. It was also found that EU legislation could be clarified in terms of AV access, since existing directives are quite general and do not make provision for the audio description of film (although it is accepted that the overseeing of audio described film products and the appointment of a regulatory body would be difficult and expensive to implement).

Current working conditions in film AD in the UK are already restrictive, with industry deadlines extremely tight and high volumes of work leaving no time for the detailed analysis of films (Greening, 2013: personal communication). The dominance of some London agencies contracted in the post-production of AD (with approximately 68% of the AD texts reviewed having been produced by ITFC, for example), may also perpetuate particular methods of work and limit opportunities for change. The presence of ‘spoilers’ (logos and text) across the material to be audio described may also cause important visual signifiers to be missed. However, the security from piracy of their material is of paramount concern to film companies, so with the outsourcing of film AD to post-production agencies, the copyright of films will continue to be strictly controlled, despite the frustrations for those assigned to audio-describe them and the resulting implications for quality. Moreover, in traditional translation, the work is often difficult and “thankless” (Nida, 1964: 155), as in film AD in the UK, where audio describers often work alone and in
silence (Greening, 2013: personal communication) with limited opportunities for qualitative feedback. The need for a quiet environment in which to write is understandable, but there is no reason why audio describers could not collaborate more fully with visually-impaired people, building on practices implemented elsewhere (as at Bayerischer Rundfunk in Munich (Dosch and Benecke 2004 referenced by Chmiel and Mazur, 2012: 59) ). However, failing the time and resources required for the involvement of visually-impaired people in AD production or quality checks, feedback could still be more generally elicited from VI spectators in the ongoing improvement of this service.

Profits in filmmaking come from an ability to please audiences (Phillips, 2000: 24), and there is no reason why this should not be the case for audio described films also. It is understandable that film companies voluntarily providing AD are “very proud” of their achievements in AD in the UK, which has helped to ‘drive’ this service across the world (Greening, 2013: personal communication). However, in AD, as in any service, commitments to quality and improvements are important, not least because AD affects the content, reception and meaning of products generating multi-millions of dollars. Ultimately, without a balanced appreciation in audio description of how a film is composed, including how characters are positioned and shot, how props are used and foregrounded and of how the physical environment and atmosphere are represented, the equitable enjoyment of mainstream films by visually-impaired spectators will continue to be limited.

6.3. Limitations of the research study

The purpose of this thesis was to understand the importance of semiotic form in mainstream films in order to qualitatively assess film AD and determine the value of connotational imagery for AD users. This research concerned patterns of semiotic content in English language films available on UK DVD with audio-descriptive tracks, making comparisons between the visual ‘language’ of film and the verbalised texts of film AD by way of a methodological model that evaluated the retention of original form and meaning. This study, thus, concerned the structural and semantic analysis of film and AD content from a qualitative perspective as opposed to a quantifiable evaluation of semiotic usage, despite strong and comparable patterns in the data collected. What was outside the scope of this study, however, was the assessment of practical issues in this field, including the motivations and cost of film AD production; criteria in post-production, as in scheduling, print quality and access to supplementary materials; writing and recording methods; levels of quality control; and the concerns of individual audio describers.
Moreover, the testing of different audio versions may not be the most comprehensive and reliable method of extracting data concerning content that is often processed subconsciously, particularly where music, sounds and dialogue may be heard simultaneously with the AD. It is additionally possible for viewers to “bring different codes to a given message and thus interpret it in different ways” to that intended (Berger, 1991: 23–24). This suggests that people do not always interpret cinematic form conventionally, particularly where the intended message is more abstract. And it is further possible to “lay too much store by the image”, which, although intentionally constructed, does not always have to represent something symbolically (Mitry, 2000: 188). Challenges, therefore, exist in the creation and understanding of film and AD texts that make certain variables inevitable regardless of the study design. It was also difficult to determine the extent to which the participants may have been influenced by having viewed or listened to some content previously. The semi-structured interview did, though, compensate in part for issues in the AD test, by producing additional data on preferences and response to verbalised imagery. The phonetic quality of audio descriptions also did not feature in this research, although this may have contributed new data to the discussion on meaning and value. Finally, it was outside the framework of this research to draft or redraft professional guidelines in film AD, although the discursive analysis, classification of form and assessment of audience reception, have gone some way in establishing how mainstream films may be successfully approached in AD.

To summarise, new concepts in film AD have emerged from this study that inform existing theory and broaden understandings in AV translation. As Cattaneo and Vecchi state: “Blindness is not simply ‘less’ vision, it is an other vision” (2011: 206), and the outcomes of this research support this notion by showing how film imagery may be conceptualised by AD users. However, within the limited resources of this study, the methodological framework of research was delimited to the qualitative study of and response to film and AD texts. The corpus of material in research is necessarily “finite”, and there will always be a level of “arbitrariness” in the data (Barthes, 1953: 155). So, with the results of this study primarily based on the analysis of 10 films and the testing and interviewing of 10 respondents (5 of which are visually-impaired), the scope for understanding how all audio described films might be received by all users was inevitably limited. The findings would, therefore, need to be corroborated in the evaluation of a much larger body of work and the testing of a greater number of respondents to be more definitive. As such, there is scope for further investigation and discussion in this area of AV translation, with approaches in audio description an expanding and rewarding area of study.
6.4. Areas for further investigation

With the assumption that AD literacy and the demand for certain types of content in AD may have changed over the years, this qualitative research and the call for a systematic approach to the more complex aspects of film are both timely and relevant. In this respect, an important point of departure for this study would be the wider development of concepts surrounding quality and user reception. For example, the qualitative approach methodology might be expanded to investigate the phonetic appropriateness of the AD voice in forming cohesion with other soundtrack elements and the ‘invisibility’ of audio description as a blended part of film narrative. Data from qualitative research can also provide preparative data for quantitative frameworks and new lines of questioning (Weiss, 1994: location 292 of 4574). The outcomes of this research may, therefore, be useful in initiating studies in other areas, including in the measure of equivalence in AD for television broadcasts. First-hand research within industry, which explores production issues and the concerns of audio describers, may also help to initiate change in conditions and practice, particularly within the small number of agencies currently producing film AD in the UK who may be influential over prevailing methods.

The continual evolution of communication media is of perpetual concern to translators (Nida, 1964: 3). In this respect, new options in the types of AD transmitted may begin to be developed, such as the foreign language translation of English ‘templates’, with related concerns for both intersemiotic and interlingual transfer. With the rise of Video on Demand services (VOD), there may also be a steady decline in the requirement for audio described discs (Greening, 2013: personal communication). And although the Authority for Television on Demand (ATVOD) confirms that AD will continue to be offered for TV programmes (2013: personal communication), no one is currently lobbying for the audio description of film downloads nor for AD generally (Greening, 2013: personal communication), so levels may not be maintained without the continued commitment of film companies or updates to existing legislation. Moreover, one UK film distributor is now using AD written in the US as opposed to the UK (Greening, 2013: personal communication), which could indicate the beginning of a trend in the more localised production of material. In this respect, although the participation of filmmakers in making their products more accessible is currently unlikely, samples of new types of scripts in which provision is made for the incorporation of AD during production, could be tested in media research studies. Ultimately, AD is a creative practice with numerous avenues of exploration in translation, writing and technical implementation.
7. Publications

An article is currently in the process of peer review with the online journal, *New Voices in Translation Studies*: ‘The Audio Description of Children's Films’.

*Abstract*

Blindness and visual impairment affect tens of thousands of children in contemporary societies where audio-visual culture and the multimedia experience are a normal part of everyday life. For these children, accessible technology is important to communication, inclusion and social development. The audio description (AD) of film is one such service that provides a means of access to otherwise inaccessible media, with the potential to contribute to the life experiences of visually-impaired children. This article investigates current practice in this field of adaptive writing, analysing aspects of audio described children's films available on DVD in the UK with the aim of identifying the principles and linguistic issues in writing for young audiences living with visual impairment. (McGonigle, forthcoming)
## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Transcription of Original and Adjusted AD Clips

*Black Swan (03:20–5:56)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IN</th>
<th>OUT</th>
<th>ORIGINAL</th>
<th>ADJUSTED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03:20</td>
<td>03:30</td>
<td>The young, dark-haired ballerina is asleep in bed. Light falls on her as the bedroom door opens. She smiles happily and sits up, looking out at the room.</td>
<td>The young, brown-haired ballerina lies awake under a pretty pink duvet. Light falls on her as the bedroom door opens. She smiles in that direction and sits up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03:34</td>
<td>03:37</td>
<td>She tilts her head to one side and flexes her toes.</td>
<td>She tilts her head to one side and flexes her toes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03:39</td>
<td>03:45</td>
<td>In the living room, she stretches out hands and one foot on the floor, the other straight up in the air. She sits and manipulates her ankle.</td>
<td>In the living room, she stretches in front of three full-length mirrors. A figure in black passes behind her. She sits and manipulates her ankle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04:05</td>
<td>04:12</td>
<td>Getting no response, the ballerina goes back massaging her foot and ankle. A plate is set with half a grapefruit and a poached egg.</td>
<td>Getting no response, the ballerina in pink vest goes back to massaging her foot. A plate is set with half a grapefruit and a poached egg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04:30</td>
<td>04:33</td>
<td>The young dancer smiles to thank her mother for the compliment.</td>
<td>The dancer, perched bird-like on a stool, smiles at her mother who's dressed in black with her hair in a bun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04:39</td>
<td>04:41</td>
<td>There's a red mark on the girl's back.</td>
<td>The girl looks in the mirror at a red mark on her back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04:43</td>
<td>04:46</td>
<td>Her mother studies the girl with penetrating dark eyes.</td>
<td>Her mother looks suspicious, her eyes dark and penetrating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04:53</td>
<td>04:56</td>
<td>The girl puts on a sweater then the pair embrace.</td>
<td>She helps the girl put on a sweater and the pair embrace.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Brokeback Mountain: part one (00:34–01:00)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IN</th>
<th>OUT</th>
<th>ORIGINAL</th>
<th>ADJUSTED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00:34</td>
<td>00:39</td>
<td>Dawn begins to break over hills and wild country. Brokeback Mountain.</td>
<td>Day begins to break over a vast landscape of rolling hills and rugged mountains. Brokeback Mountain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:48</td>
<td>01:00</td>
<td>A large truck drives along a road which is lit only by the truck's headlights. As the sun rises, telegraph poles are silhouetted like crosses against the blue sky. There are lights above the truck's cab.</td>
<td>A large truck moves along a distant highway, its lights are the only sign of life in the dark expanse of country. As the sun rises, telegraph poles are silhouetted like tall dark crosses against the grey-blue sky.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Brokeback Mountain: part two (2:01:31–2:02:47)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IN</th>
<th>OUT</th>
<th>ORIGINAL</th>
<th>ADJUSTED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:01:31</td>
<td>2:01:40</td>
<td>Ennis shuffles through the trailer. He takes off his hat and hangs it on a hook. He notices Alma Junior's sweater lying where she left it. He picks it up and goes to the door.</td>
<td>Ennis shuffles through his dishevelled trailer. He takes off his hat and hangs it on a hook. He notices Alma Junior's sweater lying where she left it. He picks it up and goes to the door.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:01:44</td>
<td>2:01:46</td>
<td>He leans out and looks down the road then shuts the door [door heard closing. Theme music starts].</td>
<td>He leans out and looks down the road then closes the door [door heard closing. Theme music starts].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:01:51</td>
<td>2:01:54</td>
<td>He tucks the neck of the sweater under his chin and folds it.</td>
<td>He tucks the neck of the sweater under his chin and folds it carefully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:02:00</td>
<td>2:02:07</td>
<td>He smells it as he finishes the last fold, then takes the sweater over to a cupboard. He opens it and lays the sweater on the top shelf.</td>
<td>He smells the sweater as he finishes the last fold, then takes it over to a closet. He opens it and lays the sweater on the top shelf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:02:12</td>
<td>2:02:21</td>
<td>His and Jack's shirts are hanging inside the door beside a postcard of Brokeback Mountain. He does up a button on Jack's blue shirt which is inside his.</td>
<td>His and Jack's shirts are hanging inside the door beside a postcard of Brokeback Mountain. He does up a button on Jack's blue shirt which is inside his.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:02:23</td>
<td>2:02:26</td>
<td>Tears well in his eyes and his mouth twitches.</td>
<td>Tears well in his eyes and his mouth twitches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:02:33</td>
<td>2:02:47</td>
<td>He straightens the postcard of the mountains with the blue sky and wispy white clouds above them then shuts the door. / Through his trailer window, he can see fields, mountains and blue sky.</td>
<td>He straightens the postcard of the majestic blue mountains with blue sky and wispy white clouds then closes the door. / Through his trailer window, green fields stretch to a distant line of yellow fields below a pale blue sky.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The King’s Speech (00:26–02:00)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IN</th>
<th>OUT</th>
<th>ORIGINAL</th>
<th>ADJUSTED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00:14</td>
<td>00:24</td>
<td>Caption: In 1925, King George V reigns over a quarter of the world’s people. He asks his second son, the Duke of York, to give the closing speech at the Empire Exhibition in Wembley, London.</td>
<td>Caption: In 1925, King George V reigns over a quarter of the world’s people. He asks his second son, the Duke of York, to give the closing speech at the Empire Exhibition in Wembley, London.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:26</td>
<td>00:31</td>
<td>A large, grey, oval microphone stands on a desk in an empty, wood-panelled, art deco room.</td>
<td>Different views of a large grey, oval microphone standing boldly on a desk in an empty art deco room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:34</td>
<td>00:50</td>
<td>Caption reads: the Weinstein Company and UK Film Council present in association with Momentum Pictures Aegis Film Fund Molinare, London and FilmNation Entertainment. A Seesaw Films/Bedlam Production. / The King's Speech.</td>
<td>Caption reads: the Weinstein Company and UK Film Council present in association with Momentum Pictures Aegis Film Fund Molinare, London and FilmNation Entertainment. A Seesaw Films/Bedlam Production. / The King's Speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:52</td>
<td>01:16</td>
<td>Waiting on a staircase at the Stadium with his wife, Bertie, the Duke of York, nervously mouths the words of a speech. He’s wearing a top hat and morning coat and leather gloves. Looking on is a group of stern-faced gentlemen and the Archbishop of Canterbury. A radio announcer in formal black tie enters the art deco room with an attendant carrying a glass of water, a spittoon and a mouth spray. He drinks from the glass [Announcer gargles].</td>
<td>Waiting at the bottom of a staircase at the Stadium with his wife, Bertie, the Duke of York, nervously mouths the words of a speech clasped in his hand. He’s wearing a top hat, morning coat and leather gloves. Gathered in front of an exit sign is a group of stern-faced gentlemen and the Archbishop of Canterbury. A radio announcer in black tie enters the art deco room with an attendant carrying water, a spittoon and a mouth spray. He drinks [Announcer gargles].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:18</td>
<td>01:22</td>
<td>He dabs at his mouth with a linen napkin. A man approaches Bertie.</td>
<td>He dabs at his mouth with a linen napkin. A man addresses Bertie from the top of the staircase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:30</td>
<td>01:36</td>
<td>The announcer sprays the inside of his throat. / On the stairs, a man approaches Bertie.</td>
<td>The announcer sprays the inside of his throat. / On the stairs, the man descends to Bertie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:40</td>
<td>01:41</td>
<td>The Archbishop leans across.</td>
<td>The Archbishop leans across.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:46</td>
<td>01:49</td>
<td>The announcer gauges distance from the microphone and performs vocal exercises [vocal sounds heard].</td>
<td>The announcer gauges distance from the microphone and performs vocal exercises [vocal sounds heard].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:53</td>
<td>01:56</td>
<td>The Duchess tenderly kisses her husband on the cheek.</td>
<td>The Duchess tenderly kisses her husband on the cheek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:58</td>
<td>02:00</td>
<td>She squeezes his arm in support.</td>
<td>She squeezes his arm in support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>ORIGINAL</td>
<td>ADJUSTED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:54</td>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>A black car drives along a country road lined with tall poplar trees and carries on passing rolling green meadows on either side.</td>
<td>A black Mercedes drives along a country road lined with tall poplar trees and carries on through deserted hilly countryside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:06</td>
<td>11:16</td>
<td>The car, which has small swastika flags fixed to the front fenders turns a bend. Father, who's at the wheel, puts on his General's cap. / In the back seat, his wife wakes the children.</td>
<td>The car, which has small swastika flags on the front fenders and suitcases strapped on the back, turns a bend. Father, in the front passenger seat, puts on his General's cap. / In the back, his wife wakes the children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:23</td>
<td>11:34</td>
<td>She and the children gaze open-mouthed as an austere grey stone house comes into view above the high perimeter cement wall and pillared gates. Mother's eyes dart about anxiously. The children are stony-faced.</td>
<td>She and the children gaze open-mouthed as an austere grey stone house comes into view above the high perimeter cement wall and pillared gates. Mother looks anxious. The children are stony-faced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:37</td>
<td>11:48</td>
<td>As the car drives into the bare gravel courtyard, soldiers shut the gates behind them. Above their heads, a stone eagle with outspread wings watches them from the top of one of the gate posts. The family get out of the car and look up at the house.</td>
<td>As the car drives into the bare gravel courtyard, soldiers shut the gates behind them. Above their heads, a stone eagle with outspread wings looks out from the top of one of the gate posts. The family get out of the car and look up at the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:52</td>
<td>12:07</td>
<td>Bruno looks at the tall leaded windows and forbidding grey façade. Inside, he sits on the stairs. The interior is all white walls and dark wooden fittings. The entrance hall is bare. As SS officers pass through into another room, Father looks across at his wife who's trying to hide her discomfort.</td>
<td>The tall leaded windows and dark exterior appear to loom over Bruno as he studies the house. Inside, the bare interior is all white walls and dark wooden fittings. Bruno sits alone near the top of the stairs framed behind the tall dark balusters. SS officers pass through to another room, as Father looks at his wife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:13</td>
<td>12:22</td>
<td>He goes off into an adjoining office and sits down at an empty table in front of a stone fireplace. As his wife looks through, he nods for the door to be shut. A soldier obliges.</td>
<td>He goes off into the adjoining office and sits down at an empty table in front of a stone fireplace. As his wife looks through, he nods for the door to be shut. A soldier obliges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:25</td>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>Putting on a brave face, mother turns to the children.</td>
<td>Putting on a brave face, mother turns to the children. / Bruno looks sulkily down through the balusters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2 – Semi-structured Interview Questions

SUBJECT #

Date:
Age:
Gender:
Nationality:
Interests:
Sight condition:
Age of onset:

1. VIEWING HABITS
   a) Do you talk about ‘watching’ films and what you’ve ‘seen’, or do you use different words? [Visually-impaired subjects only]

   b) How often do you watch films on DVD or in the cinema?

   c) What types of films do you like?

   d) If you don’t watch many films, why not?

   e) Do you listen to the director’s commentary or other DVD extras, and why?

2. AUDIO DESCRIPTION
   [Visually-impaired subjects only]
   a) What is your experience of audio description (AD)?

   b) What do you like about AD when watching films?

   c) What do you think could be done differently?

   d) Do you need anyone to explain a film in more detail even when the AD is switched on?

   e) How do you navigate a DVD menu?

   f) Can you easily create images in your mind from films (with or without the AD)?
g) Do you imagine in pictures, and if so, is this from memory, partial sight, etc.?

h) Do you think it is useful to include colours in audio description?

i) Are you aware sometimes that the information you are given in AD may be more than is available to sighted audiences, e.g. when things or places are named?

j) Are similes or metaphors helpful in AD (comparing something to something else)?

k) What else helps you build a picture in your mind of what is on screen?

3. FILM CONSTRUCTION

a) Are you interested in the way the camera moves, e.g. if it zooms or pans?

b) Are you interested in the way characters are framed, e.g. in close-up, in doorways, from above or below?

c) Are you interested if the characters are played by famous actors? Why?

d) Are you interested in ‘visual’ clues that might help you guess what is going to happen?

e) Are you interested in title sequences, graphics and credits?

f) Are you interested when subtle references are made to other films or literature?

g) Do the following technical phrases mean anything to you?

   i) ‘fades to black’

   ii) ‘cross-cut’

   iii) ‘in flashback’

   iv) ‘grainy footage’
4. **FILM MUSIC**
   
a) Does film music help you understand what is going on?

b) Does film music make you feel anything?

c) Does it add anything when a character has their own signature tune or when other music is repeated through a film?

5. **PRODUCT PLACEMENT**
   
Are you interested when brand name products are used by characters, such as the make of computer or mobile phone they use, the type of car they drive or food and drinks they consume? Why?

6. **FILM SCENARIOS**

What do the following film scenarios make you imagine or think about?

[Wait for answer before providing extra context]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Signifier(s)</th>
<th>Signified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A good looking man driving a fast sports car. He works for the Secret Service.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A lighted candle between two people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Light coloured clothing on one character and dark coloured clothing on another character. They are two cowboys.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A boy sitting alone at the top of a staircase looking through the wooden bars of the balusters.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A man lying unmoving on the ground his arms outstretched in the shape of a cross. He’s just been shot.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A person or a group of people walking in slow motion. After an event.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Someone walking away down a long corridor. He’s a teacher who has just been reprimanded by the Headmaster.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A woman in a long red dress with bright red lipstick. Everything else is shown in black and white.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Signifier(s)</td>
<td>Signified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A group of people hoisting the American flag on Independence Day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>A statue of a skeleton in a church wearing a veil, its arms crossed over its chest. The statue is shown before a murder.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>A housewife looking out of a window with the horizontal slats of a blind shown in front of her face. The film is set in Fifties America.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A completely white ranch house with an all-white interior and an old couple wearing pale clothing inside.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>A stack of dolls discarded in a dark cellar. It is a film set in Nazi Germany.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>A person framed in a doorway who won’t enter the room.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>A grey concrete house with a high perimeter wall. There is an eagle above the gates.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>A person studying someone else in a mirror. It is a woman looking at a man. It is a ballerina looking at another dancer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>A person studying themselves in a mirror.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>A couple split by a large crack that appears in the floor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>A large entrance sign with a man and an alien in a circle holding hands up in the air.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. FILM STILLS

What can you see in the following images? [Sighted subjects only]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Signified</th>
<th>Seen Film (Y/N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Star Trek</td>
<td>[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shrek Forever After</td>
<td>[Image removed due to Copyright restrictions]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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References


Ward, G. (2003), Teach Yourself Postmodernism, Reading: Hodder and Stoughton.


