Network Films: a Global Genre?

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This thesis is solely my original work, except where due reference is given.
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Abstract

Network Films: a Global Genre?

Over the past three decades there has been a boom in films which present collections of strangers whose lives coincidentally intersect, in ways unbeknownst to them but revealed to the audience. Love Actually (Curtis 2003), Babel (Iñárritu 2006), Crash (Haggis 2005), and Magnolia (Anderson 1999) are among the most internationally well known examples of such films. While a fair amount of academic attention has been paid to such films, very little work has investigated whether these types of films constitute a genre in distinction to ensemble films. Furthermore, while some cross cultural comparison has been made of such films, few have considered how the films and the concept of a global genre might relate to discursive terms such as “world cinema” and “art cinema”. Drawing on the genre theory of Rick Altman (1984, 1999) and Paul Willemen’s endorsement of comparative film studies (2005), I conduct a comparative genre study of seven network films: Babel, Crash, The Edge of Heaven (Akin 2007), Love for Share (Di Nata 2006), Code Unknown: Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys (Haneke 2000), Lantana (Lawrence 2001), and Mumbai My Life (Kamat 2008). I seek to identify whether these seven examples of network films, which show numerous similarities despite their international origins, share generic qualities. Simultaneously, I conduct analyses of their narrative politics in order to ultimately discuss how such a global group of films reframe notions of “world cinema” and “art cinema”.
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Introduction: Are Network Films a Global Genre?

In the summer of 2007 when I formulated the research proposal for this thesis I reflected on the most fascinating films I had seen over the years. They ranged from intriguing classics such as *Rear Window* (Hitchcock 1954) and *Citizen Kane* (Welles 1941), to sprawling social panoramas such as *Nashville* (Altman 1975), Kieslowski’s *Three Colours* trilogy (1993, 1994, 1994) and *Magnolia* (Anderson 1993), to contemporary complex narratives including *I Heart Huckabees* (Russell 2004), *Memento* (Nolan 2000), and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry 2004). I saw in these films a fascination with chance and fateful connections between characters that sought to remedy feelings of social and personal alienation. The sincerity of this theme was refreshing to me in light of having recently studied ideas of existentialism, pastiche and irony.¹ I was also interested in the fact that these narratives showed the complexity of relationships and interactions between people who live alongside one another as strangers, particularly in urban environments. These films, much like the labyrinthine stories of Jorge Luis Borges ([1962] 2000), exhibit provocative treatments of space, time, and character relationships. Primarily I was interested in exploring how such aspects worked narratologically and thematically in complex narratives and how such films compared with one another to signify a distinct social paradigm.

As the project proceeded, I narrowed my discussion to contemporary “network narratives” (Bordwell 2006, 97-102; 2008a 191); films such as *Crash* (Haggis 2004), *The Edge of Heaven* ([Auf der anderen Seite] Akin 2007) and *Babel* (Iñárritu 2006) which interweave multiple protagonists’ lives into a network so that audiences can recognise their comparable personal situations and relationships even if the protagonists themselves do not notice these connections. Over the past three decades there has been a global boom in films such as these. *Love Actually* (Curtis 2003), *Valentine’s Day* (Marshall 2010), *He’s Just Not That Into You* (Kwapis 2009), *Babel, Crash,* and *Magnolia* are among the most internationally well known examples.

¹ In fact, some critics suggest such contemporary films belong to a movement of “New Sincerity” in counter to theories of postmodernism (Olsen 1999; Hancock 2005). There is much contention about whether the paradigm of network society has superseded that of postmodernism (Kirby 2006; Elsaesser 2009, 16; Everett 2005, 167; Mayshark 2007, 189; Sibielski 2004). It should be noted that a discussion of postmodernism in relation to network films is not a focus of this thesis, since my study primarily concerns genre and world cinema.
During my research I realised that in making narratological and thematic comparisons, I was investigating whether these films form a well-defined body of texts, in fact, a genre. In order to commit to a genre study and explore a handful of films in depth, I limited my case studies to seven films. Each is a clear example of a network narrative, with serious cultural content that provides rich material for analysis of textual politics. This thesis analyses *The Edge of Heaven*, hereafter abbreviated to *Edge*, a Turkish German film by the acclaimed director Fatih Akin. *Edge* appealed because of its realistic and deft depiction of tragedy and love in the interwoven transnational and international relationships of six characters. *Crash* proved interesting because of its multiracial social cross section of Los Angeles and its tightly crafted visual and thematic connections between characters. The Australian film *Lantana* (Lawrence 2001) follows marital and romantic relationships amongst inhabitants of Sydney, again in a realistic and sombre fashion, and its depiction of multicultural Australia is intriguing. Similarly, the Indonesian film *Love for Share* ([*Berbagi Suami*] Di Nata 2006) compares marital, romantic and social relationships and experiences of polygamy between three different female characters. *Love for Share*, hereafter shortened to *Love*, aroused my interest as a prime example of a non-Western film to compare with the Anglo and European texts, particularly since it deals directly with Islamic practices of polygamy, as well as with multicultural Indonesian society. The French German Romanian coproduction *Code Unknown: Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys* ([*Code inconnu: Récit incomplete de divers voyages*] Haneke 2000; hereafter *Code Unknown*) contrasts different experiences of life in France, with a strikingly realistic visual style typical of its director Michael Haneke. *Mumbai My Life* ([*Mumbai Meri Jaan*] Kamat 2008), a film from India, also addresses themes of class, social and religious differences between a handful of coincidentally linked characters. Hereafter abbreviated to *Mumbai*, this film provides an apt avenue of discussion for considering how Indian cinema compares and relates to other cinemas around the world. Finally, I could not go past *Babel*, one of the most ambitious examples of a network film, as it features connections between four different narrative threads set in Morocco, Japan, and Mexico. These seven international examples of network films provide a wealth of narrative and thematic material for analysis and comparison.

It struck me that very little attention or analysis has been paid to the question of whether network films constitute a genre. Addressing this gap, my thesis provides thorough narrative analyses of these fascinating films, and presents a study of whether
films such as these can be described as a genre. While there are many cases on the borderline between network and other types of narrative, these seven films illustrate core characteristics which recur in numerous network films. These core characteristics are drawn from a “common cultural consensus” about what constitutes network films (Tudor [1974] 2000, 96). This use of a “common cultural consensus” sidesteps the “empiricist dilemma” in genre studies as Andrew Tudor describes it. Tudor writes that, when defining genre,

we are caught in a circle which first requires that the films are isolated, for which purposes a criterion is necessary, but the criterion is, in turn, meant to emerge from the empirically established common characteristics of the films. (96)

Tudor proposes that to solve this circular approach to genre definition, we “lean on a common cultural consensus” (96), an approach that I have taken. These seven examples of network films thus provide a prime sample for generic analysis. Generic categorisation is a useful way of describing how films which are alike function textually, visually, ideologically, discursively, and economically. As Michael Kearns (2008) describes it,

Genre theory reflects one of the fundamental realities of human cognition and communication: we understand and refer to phenomena by comparing them to existing categories and if necessary by modifying the categories or creating new ones. (201)

My study is one of such attempts to understand and categorise a group of texts. It is likely that network films will remain within the broad “drama”, “romantic comedy” or “foreign film” sections of DVD and online stores. Nevertheless, I contend that to determine whether or not network films from around the world constitute a genre provides a valuable contribution to the understanding of international cinema relationships.

As I researched into these films, genre, and world cinema studies, I found a recurrent convincing line of argument to be that cross cultural genre comparisons of films tend to emphasise the national divisions between texts (Moine 2008, 192). While marvellous studies exist which compare international variants of genres (Langford 2005;
Cooke 2007b), the field of genre studies remains generally Hollywood-centric (Moine 2008, 194; Staiger 2008, viii; Grant 2007, 2; Langford 2005, x). In my view necessitating a non-Hollywood-centric approach to analysing them, network films have appeared relatively simultaneously around the world, with arguably no singular national origin. Although a large number of network films were produced in America during the mid to late 1990s, many others were produced elsewhere concurrently and preceding this proliferation. I thereby propose that we think of these films as a global collection. In sum I chose seven films from different countries to test whether network films comprise what I wish to describe as a “global genre”. This is a term I explain more fully in Chapter One, but briefly, here denotes a contrast to the perception that genres are nationally divisive. This selection of seven films does not represent cinema from every country in the world. Nevertheless, it provides an extensive range through which to consider these issues of genre theory and perceptions of world cinema.

Simultaneously, my choice of “serious” films further binds together an otherwise broad international selection. Many questions involving categorical notions of “world cinema” and “art cinema” arise when considering this cross cultural selection of films. As well as confining this thesis’ scope to the manageable limit of seven clear examples of network films, the selection consists of films commonly labelled “art” films. All of the seven films were screened in film festivals and are thereby popularly labelled “art cinema” (Wong 2011, 6) in contrast to “mainstream” examples of network films such as Love Actually and He’s Just Not That Into You. This selection raises questions of whether the labels “art cinema” and “mainstream” are in fact useful. Beyond the question of whether network films can be identified as a genre, the latter part of this thesis explores how the case studies relate to terms such as “art cinema”, “mainstream cinema”, and “world cinema”.

This comparative study thereby contributes to a current focus in cinema scholarship regarding network films, genre theory, and world cinema. It refines the classification of a film format which has been globally widespread throughout the last three decades. It presents a thorough cross-cultural analysis of seven films in response to the relative scarcity of such comparative study. It expands the notion of genre, nudging it out of Hollywood-centric and nationally determinate biases, perceiving it to be a conversation between multiple countries. It questions the limitations and value of the theoretical and popularly used terms “world cinema” and “art cinema”. And it charts
Chapter Outlines

Chapter One: Situating Network Films

In Chapter One I review the extant literature surrounding network films, situating them in the cultural context of “network society” (Castells 2000a, 1). Network films, which commonly portray strangers whose lives coincidentally interlink and affect one another’s, draw on the cultural paradigm of “network society” as described by Manuel Castells (2000a, 1-4). The idea of “six degrees of separation” is emblematic of this paradigm, describing the ways in which people’s lives around the globe are now interlinked, thanks to mutual acquaintances and information technologies. It is my contention that network films respond to this social context by dwelling on the theme of whether characters are entwined in a “network community”, a term explained in Chapter Two.

Chapter One justifies my proposed definition of network films as distinctive to those of others. Two notable lengthy studies have been published on network films: David Bordwell’s chapter “Mutual Friends and Chronologies of Chance” in his 2008 book *Poetics of Cinema*, which does not label these films a genre; and María del Mar Azcona’s 2010 book *The Multi-Protagonist Film* which describes network films as a genre but includes films in which none of the characters are strangers to one another. In contrast to Bordwell’s study this thesis concentrates on whether network films can be labelled a genre. And in contrast to Azcona I argue that the fact network films connect the lives of strangers is a crucial element that distinguishes them from ensemble films.

Chapter One also details the genre theory which this thesis uses to analyse the films. I draw on the seminal theory of Rick Altman (1984, 1999), in particular his idea that genres are best defined using the notion of the interplay between semantics and syntax. As Altman defines it, semantics are the generic “building blocks” such as costumes, settings, music, props and character types (1999, 219). Syntactic elements are “the structures into which they [the semantics] are arranged”, such as the plot structures,
visual styles, and narratological patterns (219). Throughout Chapters Two, Three, Four, Five, Six and Seven I analyse the extents to which the case studies share semantic and syntactic tropes in order to ascertain whether network films might comprise a genre.

In addition to outlining the relevant literature surrounding network films and the genre theory which informs the majority of the thesis, Chapter One provides the theoretical background concerning notions of “world cinema” and “art cinema” that Chapters Seven and Eight explore further. Chapter One flags these relevant theories to forewarn the reader of the direction this thesis takes and to make clear from the outset how and why these issues are integral to the study of the seven network films. Ahead of this discussion, Chapters Two through to Seven focus on whether the seven films constitute a genre.

Chapter Two: Common Topics

Chapter Two serves as a general introduction to the seven case studies and their key issues and themes which will be addressed in detail throughout the thesis. In order to investigate whether or not network films constitute a genre, this chapter examines whether network films have semantic and syntactic consistencies in their representations of common topics and themes. Altman writes that “common topics” can be a generic semantic marker (1999, 89). Additionally, I contend that in genre studies, common themes can be considered syntactic markers.

Chapter Two provides synopses of the seven films and assesses whether they have common topics and themes. Of note, the seven films each feature a social cross section that cuts across class, cultural, gender, age and other differences. Many of them deal with cultural conflicts, violence, and depict chance encounters which highlight the complexity of urban and contemporary life. These qualities are typically arranged to draw connections between characters which in turn thematically raise questions about and reframe notions of community. In this chapter I explain my formulation of the term “network community” to describe such a theme. The term “network community” draws on the theory of “network sociality” that Andreas Wittel (2001, 51) uses to describe new types of casual and temporary relationships that global travel and communication have fostered. Yet network films frequently question whether characters also share cosmopolitan experiences and bonds based on aspects usually considered communal
(Tönnies [1887] 2001, 19). I thus arrive at the term “network community” to describe this theme, and use this term throughout the thesis.

Towards the end of this chapter I also draw attention to the fact that the films, in showing multiple characters, aim to present pluralistic narratives. However, as the subsequent chapters discuss, the ways in which the seven films manage pluralism differs according to their narrative politics. I therefore here make a concise equation to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony (1973, 4), which scholar John Bruns has also applied to network films in his 2008 article “The Polyphonic Film”. I continue an exploration of narrative polyphony throughout my analyses.

**Chapter Three: Character Types**

Chapter Three compares the seven films’ representations of characters, simultaneously delving further into their narrative politics. Altman describes character types as a semantic factor of genre films (1999, 53; see also Grant 2007, 17). In this chapter I ask whether the seven films share specific character types, observing primary recurring figures of cultural others, men in crisis, and “strong” women.

This chapter also examines the extent to which the films create pluralistic, polyphonic narratives. Looking at the characterisation and narrative trajectories it appears that the politics of representation in the seven films are often problematic. Some of them practise modes of stereotyping, feature biases around certain characters and actors that lead to the centralising of these characters while relegating others to the peripheries, and reinstate narrative hierarchies which undermine central themes of complexity and plurality. These narrative politics create distinctions between the films and bring a degree of contestation to the question of whether the films use character types generically.

Ultimately, the extent to which cultural others, men in crisis, and “strong” women can be labelled character types is questionable since these are very broad categories not exclusive to network films. However, just as genres such as musicals are not necessarily defined by aspects such as settings or plots, the non-exclusivity of these possible character types in network films highlights the fact that semantics and syntax must work together to constitute a genre (Altman 1999 220).
Chapter Four: Semantics and Syntax of Character Parallels

This fourth chapter develops Chapter Three’s exploration into whether the films treat characters in generic ways. It investigates whether the use of narrative and stylistic devices which connect network characters and the resulting theme of network community are semantic and syntactic elements. Altman describes “shared plots, key scenes…familiar objects or recognizable shots and sounds” as semantic elements, while he claims that the ways “a group of texts organizes those building blocks in a similar manner” constitutes syntactic arrangements (1999, 89). The ways in which characters connect in order to convey the themes at hand through networked relationships suggest syntax at work, in conjunction with the possibly semantic character types discussed in Chapter Three. This chapter additionally explores stylistic devices that help to convey such connections between characters, including editing, mise-en-scène, and music. Following on from the analysis of textual politics in Chapter Three, this chapter attends to how these narrative patterns and audiovisual stylistics shape representational politics and power structures, and the extent to which they express or undermine the notion of pluralism. This chapter’s examination of whether stylistic motifs exist amongst the seven case studies contributes a specifically audiovisual dimension to the investigation of whether or not these films might constitute a genre.

Chapter Five: Plots and Time

Altman’s observation that genre films use comparable plots (1999, 89) is the key focus of Chapter Five. This chapter explores whether the seven case studies present similar plots, and analyses how their use of simultaneity influences their narrative politics. The seven case studies do not all share the same plots or temporal arrangements. Some are jumbled, some are clearly linear, others are linear but are unspecific about their timelines, some are cyclical, and some are triptychs. Yet one crucial aspect of network films’ plot structures which deserves scrutiny because of its distinctiveness is the way in which the films emphasise the simultaneity of narrative threads in order to relate and shape their characters’ experiences into a coherent narrative. The ways in which their plots are arranged and the character threads are managed collectively bears key testament to the importance of the theme of network community. Furthermore, the temporal divisions, ruptures, coincidences, convergences,
parallels and manipulations in the narratives, as well as elements such as how much screen time certain characters are given and how the film is paced are intrinsic ingredients of how the films present network society in various degrees of complexity and polyphony.

Another key influence on my interpretation of the representation of time and polyphony in the seven case studies is Allan Cameron’s (2008) discussion of the representation of time in “modular narratives” (a category to which only particular network films belong [15]). Of special relevance is Cameron’s idea of a/synchrony, which can denote either the rupturing of time in a film’s structure whilst its diegesis remains coherent, or vice versa (146). It is useful to ask whether, in drawing attention to contingency and convergences, these network films might use aspects such as a/synchrony and the depiction of time in comparable, generic ways. Throughout this chapter I thus concentrate on how temporal a/synchrony, disjunctures and polyphony are expressed in the seven case studies. I examine whether the films use these elements in generic ways.

Chapter Six: Mapping Space

In Chapter Six I investigate whether the seven films’ spatial settings may be considered generic aspects in keeping with Altman’s recognition that settings often help viewers to identify particular genres (1984, 10-11). A distinctive element of network films is that they are mostly set in cities, frequently famous “global” or “world” cities (Sassen 2002, 100). Cities are apt spaces for network films to visualise their themes of connection and the concept of community. This comes in counter to the complaint that cities incite alienation. Network films frequently use cities to illustrate multicultural intersections and milieux, as the public arenas which allow characters to cross paths and have brief encounters and fleeting relationships. Through these encounters and the characters’ other types of connections, these spaces help to convey themes of network community. This chapter analyses how the films depict different types of spaces. It discusses whether they convey local or touristic points of view; notes how characters’ uses of space frequently blurs the dividing line between public and private; compares how some of the films create international spatial connections; analyses the types of spaces in which characters’ encounters occur; and considers whether the films’ moments of closure are comparable. The use of space and place in network films is
evaluated in terms of whether they share generic semantic markers and syntactic relationships, and how the use of space affects the individual films’ narrative politics and representations of pluralism.

Chapter Seven: Production Backgrounds and Distribution

This chapter explores whether the films are being produced in acknowledgement of each other and studies the films’ production backgrounds and methods of distribution in order to ascertain whether network films are being marketed as a genre. For a long time genre categories were defined by their production backgrounds (Altman 1999, 122). Genre is often understood to indicate certain industries or auteurs who repeatedly produce similar types of films. Altman describes this attitude as “genre as blueprint, as a formula that precedes, programmes and patterns industry production” (14). I analyse published interviews related to the seven case studies in order to ascertain whether their creators are making these films in view of a generic formula. I also examine whether promotional materials advertise network films as a genre.

Chapter Seven’s final section briefly compares how the films were produced and distributed around the world. It investigates the economic inequalities between the films’ production costs and their geographic ranges of distribution. These differences help to highlight and describe the relationships between film industries around the world. This chapter looks at how the seven films were received in academic work and in popular English-language online platforms. I draw attention to the confusion surrounding identifying terms such as “art cinema”, “mainstream” and “national cinema/s”. This insight into the seven case studies’ production backgrounds, categories of identification, and the controversies surrounding terms such as “art cinema” and “world cinema” pre-empts the next chapter’s discussion of how these films relate to notions of world cinema.

Chapter Eight: Network Films and World Cinema

In Chapter Eight I discuss the concept of “world cinema” in relation to the seven case studies’ narrative themes, textual elements, styles and modes of address. As noted, I partly chose the seven films to analyse because they have all commonly been labelled “art films” and they represent different cinemas commonly regarded as “national
cinema/s” or “world cinema”. Here I investigate the nature, legitimacy and value of the terms “national cinema” and “world cinema”, and discuss the association of the label “art cinema” in relation to the seven network films.

Chapter Eight outlines general characteristics attributed to “national” and “art” cinemas. It discusses how these characteristics are changing in view of globalisation and in regard to debates around the power relationships between such cinemas and the notion of “world cinema”. The effects of globalisation have long been destabilising the concepts of distinct national cinemas and the relationships between them and American cinema (see Stone 2007; Cooke 2007b; Elsaesser 2005, 485). I analyse how as individual films and as representatives of a global collection the seven case studies relate to interpretations of national, art, and world cinema. I ask whether or not these traits are typical of the industries and traditions from which the particular films come. I finally discuss how the answers to this question may contribute to a reframing of notions of industrially and nationally differentiated cinemas.

And Now for the Main Feature

Overall this study contributes to the longstanding fields of film genre studies and the recently changing approaches to comparative film studies and world cinema. Its theoretical implications are that: Altman’s theory of genre has continued applicability to recently-emerged genres; a concept of “network community” is useful to describe a key theme of network films and may be applied not only to network films but to other texts and discourses of connectivity; the definition of network films that Bordwell and Azcona’s significant studies offer require refinement; network films, unlike many other genres, represent a global genre that has arisen simultaneously around the world without one definitive originating country; accordingly the concept of world cinema needs to be reframed with a more fluid understanding of national and industry borders; a comparative approach yields a wealth of critique and the ability to appropriately analyse a global genre. In short, this study presents the field of genre studies with an additional genre, one which supports recent scholarship indicating that world cinema needs to be regarded as an interrelated whole rather than easily differentiated national cinemas.

As stated earlier, this is not an exhaustive study of network films. Instead, this study presents a specific and in-depth analysis of the extra/textual workings of a handful
of closely related network films. As noted above, the amount may be criticised as too few to warrant any conclusion as to whether the films belong to a genre. Yet as Chapter One explains, some scholars have provided studies either directly or to the effect of labelling them a genre. In consideration of this literature’s gaps I present a distinct definition of network films and take the opportunity to address important questions regarding the categorisation of cinema in film scholarship. I consider the importance of network films as a global group of films which have been created within close temporal proximity and with clear narratological overlap. This is perhaps not surprising given the contemporary global flows of cinema. Yet as a global group, and potentially a global genre, these films are remarkable because they exemplify and enact an important bridging of boundaries which have often limited the theories and concepts used in film studies. My concluding remarks highlight the significance of network films for genre and world cinema studies, and offer further avenues for investigation into this remarkable global collection of films. Ultimately the concept of a global genre crucially reframes notions of categorisation in film studies.
Chapter One: Situating Network Films

Complex Narratives

Network films are situated within a broad body of “complex narratives”. Over the last thirty years a large range of films and different media have exhibited complex narratives. Complex narratives may involve multiple primary characters, nonlinear structures, unreliable narration, multiple narrators, and switches between different settings around the world. At present there is much discussion about the contexts of complex narratives, their narrative innovations, and how they transform and are transformed by developments in communications technology (Cooppan 2001; Berg 2006; Bizzocchi 2005; Cameron 2008; Denby 2007; Dillon 2011; M.-L. Ryan 2001; Staiger 2006). Aside from cinema, contemporary complex narratives are evident in books such as David Mitchell’s *Ghostwritten* (1999), *number9dream* (2001) and *Cloud Atlas* (2004), and Sebastian Faulks’ *A Week in December* (2010). Earlier examples of complex narratives in literature include the works of Balzac ([1835] 1974), Dickens ([1859] 1992), George Elliot ([1860] 1993), Sterne ([1759] 2003), Mahfouz ([1947] 2011) and Borges ([1962] 2000). These works explore devices such as non-linear plots, unreliable and subjective narration, as well as characters who transcend multiple novels, in some as central characters and in others as peripheral ones. Puzzle elements in these types of narratives also refer to mazes, labyrinths, *trompe l’oeil*, kaleidoscopes and other devices which convey multiple perspectives and tangled social and spatiotemporal relationships.

Complex narratives in various media have become prolific with the advent of digital technology. For example, the internet has enabled people to insert hyperlinks into digital versions of complex narratives such as *The Sound and the Fury* (Faulkner [1929] 2003). Advertisements for the 2010 Soccer World Cup (“Nike Write the Future” 2010 [incidentally directed by *Babel*’s director]), Coca Cola (“Coca-Cola Security Cameras” 2012), TiVo (2008), and information technologies feature multiple narrative strands and highlight themes of global connectedness (HP 2011). Some of these advertisements represent the consumer’s ability to select multiple narratives and functions from a large range of sources (Apple “iCloud” 2011, “Siri” 2011). Online choose-your-own-adventure narratives (for example, Chad, Matt, and Rob’s *The Time Machine* from 2008), music videos such as Michel Gondry’s direction of Cibo Matto’s
“Sugar Water” (2009) and Björk’s “Bachelorette” (2006) manipulate time and space. Videogames such as *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011) and *World of Warcraft* (2004) connect players online in interactive and immersive worlds. This concentration on the manipulation of time, narrative order and themes of global connectedness is evident across different media.

During the 1990s and 2000s a number of films such as *Memento* (Nolan 2000), *The Usual Suspects* (Singer 1995), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Stranger than Fiction* (Forster 2006), *Run Lola Run* (Tykwer 1998), *Irreversible* (Noé 2002) and *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999) became famous for their innovative narratives which manipulate time and employ unreliable means of narration. In roughly the last five years examples of the trend seem to have become less frequent. These types of films which manipulate narrative structure have become defined commonly as “puzzle films”. Warren Buckland’s anthology *Puzzle Films* (2009) contains essays focusing on topics such as Wong Kar Wai’s and Charlie Kaufman’s oeuvres, and discussing narrative complexity and films such as *Memento, Run Lola Run* and *Lost Highway* (Lynch 1996). In this collection of essays Thomas Elsaesser describes puzzle films as “mind-game” films. He states that

mind-game films could be seen as indicative of a “crisis” in the spectator-film relation, in the sense that the traditional “suspension of disbelief” or the classical spectator positions of “voyeur,” “witness,” “observer” and their related cinematic regimes or techniques…are no longer deemed appropriate, compelling, or challenging enough. (2009, 16)

Complex or “puzzle” narratives address this “crisis” since they present challenging stories or puzzles that the viewer has to think through (sometimes even after the film has finished) in order to solve. With DVD and home viewing technologies it is argued that movies have had to adopt complex narratives which viewers will enjoy watching more than once (Goh 2008, 63). DVD extra features (which enhance or help solve the narrative puzzles) are also marketed in order to maintain their purchase appeal and combat the increase in movie piracy (Goh 2008, 63; Bordwell 2006, 74). The viewer plays an active interpretive role in these films, similar to that in interactive media (de Sena Caires 2007, 87). Jay Bolter (2006) echoes such media determinism when he claims that “The hybridity of our media environments has the effect of breaking through the traditional smooth surface of representation that was for decades the dominant style
in Hollywood film and television” (110). Bolter argues that these new media and narratives appear to break with or move away from classical, linear and transparent storytelling conventions associated with Hollywood. These claims signal puzzle films as an innovative body of films. Interestingly, Jan Simons (2008, 112-121) argues that the broad range of puzzle films or “mind-game films” can be divided into different categories. These categories include “forking path” narratives such as the relatively simply structured Sliding Doors (Howitt 1998) and Run Lola Run (112), and the more complex “database” and “modular” narratives such as 21 Grams, Irreversible and Memento (121). By analogy, Simons’ convincing observation that there are distinctive types of puzzle films indicates that network films can occupy a particular category within the larger body of puzzle films. Complex narratives thereby offer a rich field of study, of which my thesis on network films represents a specific part.

**The Differences Between Puzzle, Ensemble, and Network Films**

Within the field of complex films a distinct type of film has emerged which, drawing from David Bordwell (2008a, 198), I identify as the “network film”. Network films share many qualities with puzzle films. They have a tendency to manipulate time, plot order and narrative clarity and they use multiple narrative threads. Whereas a puzzle film such as Memento can have a single central protagonist, network films have multiple central protagonists. Network films thereby take a pluralistic approach to narrative, allowing multiple characters narrative centrality even if they have conflicting viewpoints. In network films the viewer is expected to decipher how each of the narrative strands fit together. Thematically, network films concentrate on tensions between chaos and order, which is a theme also prevalent in puzzle films such as Memento and Run Lola Run. Network films are also sometimes considered close relatives of omnibus films such as Paris, je t’aime (Benbithy et al. 2006), since these films also occasionally connect characters from different narrative threads. But an omnibus film comprises separate stories made by multiple directors, rather than being a film directed in its entirety by an individual. I thereby distinguish puzzle and omnibus films as different from network films.

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2 For discussions on modular narratives see Cameron (2008). For more on forking path films see Bordwell (2002a) and Branigan (2002). And for a consideration of database narratives see Bizzocchi (2005).
Network films have appeared in large number over the past three decades. These films present collections of strangers whose lives coincidentally intersect, in ways unbeknownst to them but revealed to the audience. *Love Actually, Babel, Crash,* and *Magnolia* are among the most internationally well known examples of these films. Characters often represent broad social cross sections, but collectively they share similar personal and interpersonal problems. These films have proven popular with audiences and filmmakers around the world. *Crash* won multiple Oscars for best film, editing and original screenplay in 2006. In 2007 *Babel* (following Inárritu’s prior Oscar success with *Amores Perros*) won the Oscar for best score and was nominated for best film, director, editing, original screenplay, and supporting actress (for both Adriana Barraza and Rinko Kikuchi). The British film *Love Actually* is a Christmas holiday favourite, released worldwide and screened frequently on television in English-speaking countries. *Valentine’s Day* was released and marketed similarly for its namesake. From France Cédric Klapisch’s *Paris* (2008) proved popular locally and internationally, as did the Russian film *Six Degrees of Celebration* (Bekmambetov et al. 2010). Further examples which were popular in festivals around the world include films from Iran (*Ten* [Kiarostami 2002]; *The Circle* [Panahi 2000]); Australia (*Lantana; Look Both Ways* [Watt 2005]); Indonesia (*Love*); India (*Mumbai; Life in a Metro* [Basu 2007]); Europe (*Free Radicals* [Albert 2003]; *Code Unknown*); as well as transnational productions such as the Turkish German *Edge*, and the Macedonian UK *Before the Rain* (Manchevski 1994). Many of these films have garnered acclaim and popularity in international film festivals and in their countries of production.

Network films belong to and borrow narrative devices from a vast range of cultural circuits. Given this, it is very difficult to concretely define their origins and influences upon or from social “ideoscapes” (Appadurai [1990] 2006, 591). Some early examples of network films include the Depression era Hollywood films *Grand Hotel* (Goulding 1932) and *If I Had a Million* (Cruze et al. 1932). Other filmic influences which portray elements of pluralistic points of view often cited are Kurosawa’s *Rashômon* (1950), Akerman’s *A Whole Night* (1982), Lumet’s *12 Angry Men* (1957) and Robert Altman’s ensemble films from the 1970s onwards. Altman is often spoken of as one of the key founding directors of network films (Azcona 2010, 61-79; Bordwell 2008a, 191). Since his films and influences upon network films have already been covered in depth by other authors (see Bordwell 2008a, 221-227; Azcona 2010, 61-79;
Armstrong 2011), my thesis explores more recent examples of network films by other directors.

Network films have been likened to ensemble films, since both types of films feature multiple central characters (Azcona 2010, 19-21). Ensemble movies such as *Diner* (Levinson 1982), *The Breakfast Club* (Hughes 1985), and *The Big Chill* (Kasdan 1983) show gatherings of friends or acquaintances who, united in one place during a limited period, bond and work through their differences. Ensemble films echo network films in their use of all star casts and the fact that these characters form a social group by the end of each film.

However, network films depict characters’ relationships, interactions and convergences differently to ensemble films. In ensemble films, if they are not already friends, characters come to know each other as close friends before they depart on their separate ways. Network films, however, feature people who are and mostly remain strangers to one another. If characters do know one another, this often comes as a surprise to the audience. Frequently only the audience, rather than the characters, recognise the significance and depth of connections between them. Where ensemble films like those from the 1980s create small groups of friends pitted against the wide world, network films tend to create a world of potential friends out of strangers. Many network films also thematically concentrate on issues of globalisation, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism and social problems rather than simply group dynamics as ensemble films do. Network films thereby often aim to make pluralistic statements about the conditions of the world and particular societies. Such narrative devices and concerns distinguish network films from ensemble films.

**Why Call Them “Network” Films?**

One of the reasons I find the term “network film” suitable is due to the films’ resemblance to themes in network theory (Castells 2000a, 2000b; Watts 2003). Network theory is the study of the ways in which people are socially, physically, geographically, technologically, financially, and politically connected or related around the world (see Barabási 2002). It has blossomed as an area of scientific and mathematical study throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Watts 2003, 316). Stanley Milgram’s Small World theory, more commonly known as the “six degrees of separation” hypothesis, is noted
as one of the foundations of network theory (Watts 2003, 37-9). In the 1960s Milgram tested his hypothesis that people living in North America are connected by no more than six degrees of separation. He sent out letters to roughly three hundred people in Boston, Omaha and Nebraska. In the letters he asked the recipient to send on the letter through their own acquaintances to a person they did not know in Boston. Milgram’s results confirmed his hypothesis, as letters reached the intended recipient with the help of no more than six senders (Watts 2003, 37-9). A similar motif is seen in the network film *Twenty Bucks* (Rosenfeld 1993) in which we follow a twenty dollar note as it passes through the hands of loosely connected characters. Network theory has become an extremely complex field of mathematical and scientific study with the proliferation of information and communication technologies around the world.

In network films, characters resemble the nodes on network models, usually “small-world” or “random” ones (Figure 1.1; see the Appendix for visualisations of how the case studies’ network characters connect). The links between the nodes are the ways in which characters know, intersect with, and/or compare to one another. Network characters are those who have multiple links, which may be through family, friends, acquaintances and other people they know or have in common. For example, in *Crash* Anthony hijacks Cameron’s car, Cameron yells at the police officer Tom, and Tom later happens to meet Anthony’s best friend Peter. None of these characters know how closely they are connected to each other and we see each of them individually in scenes by themselves. This connectivity as well as their narrative centrality renders each of these characters network characters. Tom and Anthony also constitute “mutual
strangers” (Bordwell 2008a, 201), since they do not know each other but meet people in common. Network characters do not have to know one another to be linked. They can interact, appear in the same space simultaneously or at different times, and share similar problems. These similarities and brief or delayed encounters connect characters thematically. Links can also be constituted in the form of family members, friends and acquaintances. However, in contrast to peripheral characters, network characters are usually shown in multiple environments and circumstances, in relation with differing network figures, and in isolation. Timecode (Figgis 2000), for example (although it is not one of this thesis’ case studies), emphasises this visually (Figure 1.2). Each of its four characters is related to and/or knows one another, but is shown in individual quadrants of a split screen. The characters have private moments away from other people, and cross into each others’ quadrants. This combination of isolation and interaction with other characters visually underscores the films’ focus on a society made up of individuals who have differing points of view.

![Figure 1.2](image)

The label “network films” is also pertinent to the films’ encapsulation of the cultural paradigm of “network society”, a term Manuel Castells uses to describe the global political, economic and social connectedness aided by the rise of the internet (2000a, 1). Castells writes that

Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture. (500)
Castells argues that these economic and media networks necessitate “the redefinition of cultural codes”, since the majority of the world’s relationships rely on networks which reshape the politics of national and social borders (2000b, 695). Concurrently with network theory, the paradigm of “network society” as Castells describes it came to fruition in the late twentieth century. The rise of the internet and social networking sites, coupled with the effects of globalisation, has changed the face of the world. Along with this interface of global connections, the way in which we think about boundaries and connectedness has altered. The term “network” points to the ways in which these films depict the spaces, subjects and “ideoscapes” (Appadurai [1990] 2006, 591) of this period, and through various modes of distribution and address, traverse the world. In discussions of network films authors such as Everett (2005, 167), Bordwell (2008a, 198) and Kerr (2010, 39) cite the significance of the network society paradigm. The term “network film” thus describes the way in which characters are distinctively connected in these films, in contrast to ensemble films or single protagonist narratives.

On the Way to “Network Community”

The ways in which network society changes social relationships are intrinsic elements of network films. The films show various ways in which people are connected both within and outside of traditional relationships. Many authors explore the ways information technologies, global travel, the flexibility of the workday within global twenty-four hour time, megacities and other influences have changed the way in which we regard the world and interpersonal relationships (Castells 2000a, 2000b; Chambers 2006; Thrift 1999; Hutton and Giddens 2000; Weston 1991; Latour 2005; Hassan and Purser 2007). Instead of proclaiming social alienation and a “death of community” as was popular throughout the twentieth century (Simmel [1903] 1997, 70; Rheingold 1994, 25), Chambers argues that the notion of friendship has defined the late capitalist era (2006, 21). She points out that studies of long-distance relationships in the 1980s and 90s drew the conclusion that “communities were not declining, but were being freed from the spatial boundaries of neighbourhood and kinship” (31). Drawing on Derrida’s definition of friendship as a self-sacrificial responsibility toward the Other (Derrida 2005, 178), Chambers states

The friendship ideal, as a chosen relationship that transcends obligation, seems to fit neatly into a society characterised by expressive individualism.
It represents a shift from obligation to choice in modern confluent relationships. (2, original emphasis)

This is an attitude which is topical in many network films. Being able to choose which strangers will become and remain friends, to the extent that it is possible to believe that any stranger is a potential friend, is a resounding theme. Many network films end with the implication that, in spite of our individual problems and hardships, we should find comfort in the thought that everyone’s lives are intricately connected. At the same time, some films question whether such connections do bring comfort or a sense of community in the face of complex social problems and alienation.

Such an emphasis on new socialities is a topic I explore throughout my textual analysis of network films. I apply a combination of cultural theories to form the term “network community” to describe a definitive theme running throughout the seven films (see Chapter Two 46-9). Since this chapter continues to examine the relevant literature pertaining to whether or not network films constitute a genre, I further explain the concept of “network community” in the next chapter. In brief, I combine Wittel’s (2001) term “network sociality” with the term “community” to describe the films’ constructions of cosmopolitan communities between their networked characters. My formulation of “network community” thus attends to a key concept which focuses and distinguishes my analysis of network films from those already in existence.

Existing Definitions of Network Films

Aside from the label “network films”, various terms have been used to describe these types of films. Yet critics and theorists have been slow to describe them as a genre. I contend that it is important to discern whether network films are a genre so that this lingering question is answered and so that the classification of these films can be more clearly and comprehensively defined. As explained in the Introduction, in order to define a genre it is important to sidestep the “empiricist dilemma” of genre definition, wherein the criterion for definition often are proposed paradoxically both a priori and a posteriori to analysis (Tudor [1974] 2000, 96). Thus in the following section I seek out network films’ core characteristics from a “common cultural consensus” amongst commentators (Tudor [1974] 2000, 96). It is clear that scholars and commentators are attempting to define and label these films as a particular group which share distinctive
attributes. This act of categorisation importantly indicates that network films are noticeable as a unique body of films which offer interesting if not innovative narrative techniques. Genre theorist Rick Altman describes this process as “genrification”, indicative of the formation of a genre (1999, 62). He writes that “The constant sliding of generic terms from adjective to noun offers important insight into film genres and their development” (52). The adjectives used to describe these types of films at the moment are sliding and plentiful, and indicate that the films are being thought of as a distinct category. As shown above, network narratives indeed have defining aspects which differentiate them from single protagonist dramas, ensemble films and other types of puzzle films.

While there have been many terms used to describe these types of films, for various reasons that I here explain they do not satisfy my own perception of the qualities which I see as definitive of network films. One of the most popular and widely used terms for puzzle films including network films has been Alissa Quart’s “hyperlink cinema” (2005). This term’s popularity is evident in the fact that Wikipedia has an entry titled “Hyperlink cinema”, but does not have entries on “network films” or any of the other descriptive terms considered here. Quart’s term notes puzzle films’ comparability to internet technology as they tend to switch or “hyperlink” between scenes and narrative threads. However, the term “hyperlink cinema” does not capture the emphasis network films place on characters connecting in real physical spaces as well as virtually through thematic parallels. It overplays the “interactive” aspect of the internet in contrast to the more passive position of the film viewer. And it is a term which Quart claims can include single protagonist, paired protagonist or ensemble films such as Go! (Liman 1999), Memento and The Double Life of Véronique (Kieslowski 1991). I thereby find “hyperlink cinema” too broad a term to usefully describe network films.

Roger Ebert (2007) adopted Alissa Quart’s term “hyperlink cinema” (2005), and in his 2005 review of Crash also describes “interlocking” and “cross-cutting” story motifs in Crash, Grand Canyon (Kasdan 1991) and Short Cuts (Altman 1993). Yet I contend that the term “cross-cutting” is too vague to define network films since it may also apply to single protagonist narratives which use that editing technique. Although the term “interlocking” story is appropriate, I find it does not capture the importance of the paradigm of network society as “network cinema” does. Neither “hyperlink” nor “interlocking” nor “cross-cutting” therefore satisfy my definition of network films.
Hamid Naficy describes multilingual films with complex narratives as “multiplex” films, since they are often screened in and narratively resemble multiplex cinemas in which stories from around the world and from different industries are shown (2010, 15). Naficy (2010, 18) provides an interesting discussion on the relationships between diasporic filmmakers, their subjects, and what he sees as the appropriation of these subjects by mainstream cinemas. I return to Naficy’s arguments at various points in this thesis. However, the fact that Naficy uses the term “multiplex narratives” to refer to ensemble films such as Letters from Iwo Jima (Eastwood 2006) and omnibus films such as Paris, je t’aime precludes me from using it as a defining label.

Patricia Pisters (2008) describes films such as Babel and WWW: What A Wonderful World (Bensaidi 2006) as “mosaic films” since they present different stories which as a whole connect to form a larger social portrait. The term “mosaic” has merit, in that it echoes how the films create stories out of separate narrative threads. Nevertheless, I prefer the term “network” because it describes the social paradigm in which these films have flourished.

Wendy Everett’s term “fractal films” is the closest term in common to “network films”. Everett (2005) discusses films such as Magnolia, Code Unknown and Intermission (Crowley 2003), describing them as “fractal films”. She writes that they are

‘fractal’ – since they both illustrate and explore the complex architecture of chaos – [they] are structured as a series of apparently unrelated stories that intersect and interact with each other in random, unstable, and unpredictable ways. (160)

This term’s reference to chaos theory duly stresses that such films place strong thematic emphasis on chance and create order out of initially chaotic “fractal” threads (see Hayles 1990, 1991 for discussions of chaos in narrative; Figure 1.3 for an illustration of a fractal Mandelbrot set).
“Fractal” is a term that aptly applies a contemporary scientific paradigm relevant to network films, much as the term network cinema draws on network theory. Everett’s analysis also contains a section on the concept of network society although she prefers “fractal” as an adjective. While the term “fractal” places a strong emphasis on the theme of chance and chaos in these films, I find that the dual implication of “network theory” and “network society” in the term “network film” indicates an equally important focus on the social relationships portrayed in the films. Therefore I find the term “network” film more appropriate to my research since it connotes the importance of the films’ social themes as well as their emphasis on chance connections.

While the above terms have value I prefer the term “network film” because it highlights the social paradigm of network society that the films emerge from and address in their thematics. The term “network cinema” also highlights the strong role characters play as vectors of information, parallels and as components of a network. My choice of the term “network” narrative does not discredit the importance of these other terms. Yet the adjective “network” stresses the importance of the social paradigm of network society which these films describe and in which they have proliferated. The term “network” is thus particularly relevant to my analysis as I concentrate on films’ themes of social connectedness and the cinematic devices which they use to convey these themes.

The Question of Genre

None of the authors considered above describe network films as a genre. But it is clear that these authors are attempting to distinguish these types of narratives as
distinct groups. They are thereby engaged in a process of “genrification” (Altman 1999, 62). Moreover, some of these and other reviews propose that it is a possibility that such films constitute a genre. Everett notes that “fractal films” are “thus far lacking generic or other forms of classification” (2005, 159). In his taxonomy of different puzzle film plot types, Charles Ramírez Berg (2006) asks generally “Do these films represent a movement, trend, cycle, or possibly something bigger, more profound, and potentially more significant?” (8). Evidently scholars and reviewers are aware of network films as a specific group, possibly a genre. One reviewer briefly claims that in making Amores Perros, 21 Grams, and Babel, Iñárritu has “somehow made from [sic] the network narrative a superior genre” (Toderici 2008). David Denby (2007) of The New Yorker writes of “the new disorder” in films, discussing the theme of chaos and order in films like Memento, Pulp Fiction (Tarantino 1994) and Babel. He quips that “‘Babel’ feels like the first example of a new genre – the highbrow globalist tearjerker”. Not all network films are set in multiple countries or construct and manipulate similar pathos to Babel. Yet Denby’s description aptly, however irreverently, echoes Martin Roberts’ observation that in recent years there exist films such as Baraka (Fricke 1992), Night on Earth (Jarmusch 1991) and Until the End of the World (Wenders 1991) which are made with international input and are also textually “about…the world” (1998, 63). Such attention to global issues is a recurring quality in network films. Thus, Denby’s and Roberts’ observations that there exist a group of films explicitly concerning globalisation reflect common attempts to label network narratives as a genre.

Directly addressing the issue of genre, Hsuan L. Hsu (2006) importantly describes Crash as belonging to “an emergent genre…of ensemble films” (134). Hsu’s argument lends notable weight to the claim that network films may form a genre. However, Hsu’s claim does not present a strong enough case for a genre of network films since the term “ensemble films” is too broad. As discussed above, the term “ensemble films” is problematic because of its application to films like The Big Chill and The Breakfast Club which lack the important emphasis of fleeting connections between strangers which characterise network films. Furthermore, the fact that there have been a diverse and longstanding range of precursors to network films problematises Hsu’s term “emergent”. And while Hsu acknowledges examples set elsewhere in America such as Nashville (Altman 1975) and the Mexico and USA located Traffic (Soderbergh 2000), he specifically discusses examples set in Los Angeles and their putative locally-inspired themes. In contrast, my study is not limited
to American examples. Nevertheless, this proposition that network films be considered a genre supports my hypothesis.

The most superbly comprehensive study of these films to date has been Bordwell’s chapter *Mutual Friends and Chronologies of Chance* from his 2008 book *Poetics of Cinema*. He describes films such as *Magnolia*, *Nine Lives* (García, 2005), *What’s Wrong With This Picture?* (Svendsen, 2004) and lists over one hundred and fifty other films as having or relating to a “network format” or being closely related (2008a, 191, 245-250). He draws the term from theories relating to narrative, network theory, network society and communications technology that I have outlined above (Bordwell 2006, 97-102; 2008a, 197-98). Bordwell and Thompson (2006) describe network narratives as those which “[highlight] several protagonists inhabiting distinct, but intermingling, story lines”. I draw heavily on Bordwell’s definitions of network films throughout this thesis. However, Bordwell does not mention or discuss whether or not network films constitute a genre. I consequently addresses this question which is absent in Bordwell’s work.

Bordwell’s 2008 chapter lists conventions of what he calls the network form. Below I note these in a list form which I have separated into categories of narrative conventions, stylistic devices, temporality, settings, themes and discourses.

**Narrative conventions:**

- There are several central protagonists who have narrative prominence, in contrast to single or paired protagonist plots (192).
- The different characters’ plotlines “don’t affect one another much” (190), “are largely decoupled from one another, or only contingently linked” (192), and the characters are often unaware of each other, being strangers (201).
- Character’s lives “intersect only occasionally – often accidentally” (191). When they do cross paths, the paths “tend to remain distinct and of equal prominence” (193).
- The meaning viewers derive from characters’ convergences is the form’s main drama and the convergences can “replace the usual arc of goal-directed activity” (199), although characters’ threads can still be “goal driven to various degrees” (200).
• Connections of family, friendship, and acquaintance between characters can be concealed for much of a film (199). “The narration must reveal connections, anticipate connections, and conceal connections” (207, original emphasis).

• The “mutual strangers create gaps or weak links” in the stories, but characters with “strong ties…are bound together by long-term ties of kinship, love, friendship, or acquaintance” (201).

Stylistic devices, temporality and settings:

• There is a “tension between realism…and artifice” in the films, as a story contrives to meaningfully connect the characters, using the realistic premise that people constantly and arbitrarily intersect with strangers (194).

• To connect characters meaningfully but realistically some films use a “closed-environment tale” which shows one location in which characters connect (194). Recurrent settings are “hotels, apartment houses, cafés”, and common “event frames” are weddings, reunions, birthday parties, conventions, political rallies, holidays, and other occasions (203).

• “City life is a natural terrain for network narratives…”, and themes of urban alienation and the lonely crowd often come to the fore, although often “the city-based plot aims at overcoming urban alienation” (213).

• Characters “inhabit more or less the same space-time framework and can interact face-to-face in given conditions” (199).

• Conventions that connect characters by proxy include “mass media” such as television, radio, and phones. Objects that circulate amongst characters can also link them (202).

• Network films often bring characters together at the climax, either converging in a particular space or “brought together at the level of the narration” (208).

• The use of parallel editing (which cuts between characters in different spaces and times in order to show their thematic similarities) and crosscutting (which emphasises their simultaneity) “can assure us that the…characters’ fates are somehow linked” (208).

• The narrative styles are often self-conscious, using intertitles, juggling time, and openly suppressing narration (209-211).

• Parallels are drawn between characters who may or may not meet (211-212).
Themes and discourses:

- A network film constructs “a social structure of acquaintance, kinship, and friendship beyond any one character’s ken” (190).
- The viewer has to figure out “the bigger picture” and we “mentally construct not an overarching causal project but an expanding social network” (193).
- The survey of characters creates the sense of “life as a whole” (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197). The movement from chaos to order also sometimes creates a “comforting” theme of design (214).
- “Because of the shared-time principle, the narration tends toward omniscience” (200).
- Recurring themes are “the contrasts among social groups or the hope that barriers can be transcended through commonalities” (200). Many films portray “troubled romances” and “different styles of loving” (201, 214). The “New Europe” is a recurring theme in European examples, as is “overcoming national barriers” elsewhere (213). Other recurring themes include “disparities between rich and poor, contrasts between Great Event and ordinary life, problems of urban anomie and national differences, and puzzles of chance and fate” (214).
- Viewers can come to “expect” that characters will connect (201, 209).

These points aptly describe the qualities of network films found within and surrounding a wide range of examples. I use these points as foundation areas to address in my analysis of whether network films constitute a genre.

Due to Bordwell’s concentration on film “poetics”, which pays close attention to narratological factors and cognitive processes (2008b, 2-4), his essay forgoes in-depth analysis of the narrative politics or ideologies of the films he discusses. There are many instances in which he presents insightful, yet brief, critiques (e.g. 2008a, 214, 220, 221). And he does devote roughly twenty pages of textual analysis at the end of the chapter to two American films (Nashville and Magnolia) and two French films (Favoris de la Lune [Iosseliani 1985] and Les Passagers [Guiguet 1999]) (221-242). Yet these mostly attend to narratological processes and on the whole Bordwell does not pay much attention to analysis of textual politics within the films. This is to be expected as his characteristic approach to film scholarship deliberately focuses on questions of narratology and cognitive processes rather than ideology or textual politics (2008b, 2-4;
see 1988, 81-2). Alternately, my study explores questions of textual and gender politics throughout the case studies. I see such questions as important to textual analysis because they illustrate relationships of power which discursively represent, inform, and influence social perspectives (Hall 1997 3-4). Whereas Bordwell’s study provides a comprehensive taxonomy and explanation of qualities in network films over a broad spectrum, this thesis explores only a select handful of films in order to analyse and compare their narrative and ideological workings in detail.

Most importantly, although Bordwell’s study offers a vast taxonomy which lists over one hundred and fifty examples of network films, he does not describe them as a genre. Bordwell’s observations are typical of a genre study, and as Azcona argues, “all but confers them generic status” (2010, 6). The conventions that Bordwell describes conceivably fall into both semantic and syntactic categories, categories that Altman describes as being essential to the identification of a genre. For these reasons, agreeing with Azcona I argue that network films represent more than a stylistic form as Bordwell describes them. My argument accordingly differs significantly from Bordwell’s because it directly addresses and analyses the important question of genre in relation to network films. In the section below I explain the importance of and further develop this question. I define essential genre terms, review the existing literature which claims that network films constitute a genre, and explain the basis for my examination of the case study examples as a possible genre.

**Genre Theory**

As noted earlier, generic categorisation is an extremely useful way of describing how films which are alike function textually, visually, ideologically, discursively, and to some extent economically. Since there are numerous examples of network films, and since their formal elements are so distinctive, I contend that they warrant consideration as a potential genre. I have chosen the label “genre” in contrast to the categories of “cycle” or “subgenre”. The terms “cycle” and “subgenre” respectively indicate short-lived and fewer films in comparison to longer-lasting and plentiful genre films (Grant 2007, 36-7). A case could be made for either term to label network films. Some may consider network films a subgenre of drama, or in some cases thrillers (Azcona 2010, 6; Bordwell 2008a, 217). However, their shared characteristics are so distinctive, the categories of drama and thriller genres so broad, and the amount of network films is so
significant, that they appear as a notably unified and independent group rather than a “subgenre”. The fact that network films were mostly popular from mid 1990s to mid 2000s indicates they have had a short lifespan, suggesting they are a cycle, as deWaard argues (2007, 12). However, Barry Keith Grant also states “Genre history, at least, does seem to be shaped to a significant degree by cycles, relatively brief but intense periods of production of a similar group of genre movies” (2007, 36). Thus, Grant labels cycles as part of the production of genre films. I thereby concentrate on whether network films convey generic attributes, without discounting the possibility that they constitute a cycle. Network films have certainly flourished and seemingly waned in a short period of time, and they do relate to categories of ensemble films, puzzle films, or even the exceptionally broad category drama. However, since examples of network films have appeared at various times over the last century and since they have distinctive qualities which set them significantly apart from ensemble and puzzle films, I consider the term “genre” to be more appropriate as a hypothetical term than “cycle” or “subgenre”.

In the field of cinematic genre studies, Rick Altman has championed an analytical approach which has proven enormously popular and useful. His seminal 1984 essay “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre” and later book Film/Genre (1999) discuss the terms of generic categorisation. His theory has influenced popular and leading discussions of genre (Grant 2007, 4; Langford 2005, 10; Moine 2008, 28). As discussed above, Altman’s theory of genre insightfully points to how genres develop within a process of “genrification” (1999, 62). Network films are clearly undergoing “genrification”, and Bordwell’s and Azcona’s studies are superb examinations of the morphology of network films (with the reminder that, unlike Azcona, in my view network films are distinguishable from ensemble films). Altman’s theory of “semantics” and “syntax” (1984, 10) provides a detailed and well defined method of describing and analysing films of a similar ilk.

Altman uses two key terms to define genre: “semantics” and “syntax” (1984 10). I evaluate these terms in regard to the seven case studies. Altman argues that genres can be identified by their semantic elements and syntactic elements. Raphaëlle Moine (2008) concisely summarises Altman’s theory thus:

The semantic level corresponds to the question ‘What is said?’ and the syntactic level to the question ‘How is it said?’ (14)
As noted in the Introduction, semantic elements are considered “building blocks” such as costumes, settings, music, props and character types (Altman 1999, 219). I discuss semantics in relation to the films’ use of topics (Chapter Two), character types (Chapter Three), mise-en-scène and music (Chapter Four), and settings (temporal in Chapter Five, spatial in Chapter Six). Syntactic elements are “the structures into which … [the semantics] are arranged” (219). These can include the plot structures, visual styles, and narratological patterns. I discuss syntax in relation to network films’ themes (Chapter Two), character parallelism and stylistic devices (Chapter Four), and plot structures (Chapters Three, Five, and Six). Altman proposes that genres be identified by both the semantics and syntax, since “a dual approach permits a far more accurate description of the numerous intergeneric connections typically suppressed by single-minded approaches” (221). In other words, while many types of films may use similar semantics or syntax, it is the ways in which these aspects synthesise that narrows down the definition of a genre. While these two factors are essential to Altman’s conception of genre, he also warns that “there is anything but general agreement on the exact frontier separating semantic from syntactic views” (1984, 10).

In order to investigate whether network films are a genre, I explore whether they use semantic and syntactic elements comparably. It should be noted that the idea that a film fits rigidly into only one particular genre is problematic since the boundaries between genres often blur (see Staiger 1997). The disparities between the types of films included in critics’ definitions of network films, as discussed above, illustrate that network films have blurry boundaries. Many examples of network films fit into established genres (such as the romantic comedy [Love Actually, He’s Just Not That Into You] and the thriller [Lantana]), and as discussed above the lines are somewhat blurred between ensemble films and network films. Bordwell (2008a, 214-15) also discusses borderline examples of network films such as Free Radicals (Albert, 2003), Look Both Ways (Watt, 2005), and Go!. These examples contain characters who are much more central than others, or are not strangers to one another. But they do sometimes emphasise chance connections and feature multiple characters. Notably, then, the boundaries of network films can be permeable. Because I agree with Bordwell’s accounts in this regard, I do not see a further discussion of borderline cases as necessary to this project. My study focuses on clearly recognisable samples. This approach recognises that genre categories are useful for identifying texts’ common themes, forms
and ideologies (Altman 1999, 27). This selection of clearly recognisable examples allows me to cut across an important dividing line within genre studies: the concept of world cinema, considered presently.

There are two notable instances of network films being analysed as a genre. Wesley Beal takes up the term network narrative and calls it a genre in his 2009 conference paper “Theorising connectivity: the form and ideology of the network narrative” (405). Beal outlines three axes that network films use to convey their connections. He looks at the “characterological” connections, material connections, and the figure of the crowd. He argues that it is along these axes that the ideology of network films is represented (405). These are also qualities that this thesis examines, but I omit the term “axes” in favour of the aspects of semantics and syntax, within which the qualities Beal discusses are present. A key distinguishing factor between Beal’s paper and my thesis is that Beal’s research concentrates on American examples of the films. Beal’s selection of American films repeats similar tendencies to other analyses which select nationally uniform and/or few international examples (see Hsu 2006; Azcona 2010). This thesis thereby takes the cue to compare films further afield in order to investigate the implications of a cross cultural and international body of films.

The most substantial description of network films as a genre is contained in María del Mar Azcona’s book The Multi-Protagonist Film (2010). Azcona describes ensemble films as films which emphasise “interconnectedness and random crisscrossing[s] of characters” as the “multi-protagonist” genre (32). She closely analyses five American films – Grand Hotel, Short Cuts, American Pie (Weitz 1999), Singles (Crowe 1992) and Syriana (Gaghan 2005). Azcona draws comparisons to other films that are nevertheless predominantly American and/or English-language films. Her definition of the multi-protagonist genre is different to my perception of network films since she includes the ensemble film form. She analyses films such as American Pie and Singles which fit the ensemble film category since they do not attempt to disguise the fact that characters know one another. Azcona considers these films “multi-protagonist films” since they convey characters’ threads “as equally valid channels of personal development” (89). Azcona’s defining emphasis here falls on the plurality of characters’ voices and narrative positions, since these films do not highlight elements of contingency or chance connections between characters. This point regarding narrative pluralism is important and is a point of discussion throughout this thesis. However, this
definition does not draw attention to the importance of characters’ strangeness to one another which many argue is a key feature of network films (Everett 2005, 160; Bordwell 2008a, 192; Pisters 2008; Bruns 2008, 200, 203). Thus, while Azcona talks of films including network films as a genre, her definition of the “multi-protagonist” genre lacks a crucial element of the network films that I explore.

As stated earlier, Azcona argues that Bordwell’s study of network films “all but confers them generic status” (2010, 6). She refers to Altman’s theory of “genrification” (Altman 1999, 62) to classify the films by the fact that discourses around them are seeking to define them as a genre, as described earlier (Azcona 2010, 27-32). Aiming to avoid “pigeonholing” the films according to a “generic grid”, Azcona takes a broad approach to classifying the “multi-protagonist” genre (7). I highly esteem her study and her observation that generic boundaries are flexible. Yet I wish to consider network films’ keen focus on presenting social cross sections of strangers, in contrast to multi-protagonist or ensemble films’ networks of closely connected characters. Furthermore, Azcona does not use Altman’s terms “semantics” and “syntax”, instead discussing the lineages and the similar qualities of five main case studies and stating that these similarities amount to generic status. In using Altman’s formulation of semantics and syntax, my approach carries out a more detailed application of Altman’s theory of genre.

Azcona provides a clear definition of multi-protagonist films, which includes all of the same qualities that Bordwell describes in the list above (Azcona 2010, 37-8). She sees two aspects in particular as central to the definition of multi-protagonist films. These two aspects are their portraits of “cultural changes in intimate matters and the various effects in people’s lives of globalizing and transnational processes” (8). These aspects are indeed central concerns of network films and are investigated throughout this study. As a point of differentiation, however, my investigation of the concept of “network community” (see Chapter Two 46-9) throughout the films concentrates on the importance of the characters as a group of strangers. Thus, in distinction to Azcona I further refine the question of whether these films are a genre according to Altman’s theory; provide a broader geographical and cultural scope of examples; and describe and elaborate on a key theme which the films project and which Azcona’s study downplays.
These arguments suggest that network films potentially constitute a genre. Bordwell’s study is the most comprehensive to date, yet his reluctance to describe them as a genre sidesteps a rich opportunity to investigate the changing dimensions of genre in current international contexts. Azcona’s (2010) and Beal’s (2009) discussions of these films support the claim that network films form a genre, yet Beal’s analysis is limited to American examples and Azcona’s definition of “multi-protagonist films” is significantly different to mine of “network films”. In order to investigate whether network films constitute a genre, further research needs to be undertaken, which this thesis conducts.

A Global Genre?

Primarily, I chose seven films from different origins because, despite the prevalence of numerous genres around the world, genre studies have long been closely associated with Hollywood-centrism (Staiger 2008, viii; Grant 2007, 2; Langford 2005, x). While some attention and reference to other films is given throughout the thesis, as explained in the Introduction I concentrate on these seven films:

- **Babel** (Iñárritu 2006)
- **Code Unknown: Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys** (hereafter abbreviated to **Code Unknown** (Haneke 2000)
- **Crash** (Haggis 2004)
- **The Edge of Heaven** (hereafter abbreviated to **Edge**) (Akin 2007)
- **Lantana** (Lawrence 2001)
- **Love for Share** (hereafter abbreviated to **Love**) (Di Nata 2006)
- **Mumbai, My Life** (hereafter abbreviated to **Mumbai**) (Kamat 2008)

These films are from different countries, but to focus my analysis further, they were distributed internationally via film festivals. Because of their close associations with film festivals, these seven films are commonly perceived as “art films” rather than mainstream or Hollywood films (Wong 2011, 6). The fact that they are all about “serious” cultural subjects rather than being comedies or solely romance stories bolsters this association (Wong 2011, 99). A brief definition of art cinema is that in terms of narrative it is said to favour realism, open-endings, ambiguity, intellectual rigour, and a

This vague label “art cinema” invites questions of how cinemas and genres around the world are defined. It also raises questions about how various non-Hollywood industries engage with genres. Altman’s later work expresses his misgivings about his earlier certainty about the cultural uniformity of genres. He reflects

Assuming stable recognition of semantic and syntactic factors across an unstable population, I underemphasized the fact that genres look different to different audiences, and that disparate viewers may perceive quite disparate semantic and syntactic elements in the same film. This blindness in turn kept me from fully investigating the possibility that genres might serve diverse groups diversely. (1999, 207)

Altman’s revised attention to the plurality of film reception informs my investigations in Chapters Seven and Eight as to how network films are categorised upon their reception. These investigations help to consolidate whether network films indeed semantically/syntactically deserve, and have come through processes of genrification, to be regarded as a global genre. Whereas Altman concentrates on genres of Hollywood origins, I agree with Bordwell (2008a, 244) and Kerr (2010, 38-9) that network films originate from diverse international lineages. At the same time, while they “might serve diverse groups diversely” (Altman 1999, 207), I investigate whether they might nonetheless be viewed similarly around the world as a comparable collection, or global genre.

Genre studies often focus heavily on American examples, or if they move further abroad they usually discuss how non-American films use American genres to address local issues (Moine 2008, 190-192; Grant 2007, 103; see Sanders 2009). In recent years some genre studies have sought to redress this narrow focus by attending to
cross-pollinations between Hollywood and other cinemas (Langford 2005, x). For example, Paul Cooke’s volume *World Cinema’s ’Dialogues’ With Hollywood* is an exceptional collection of contributions focusing on transnational relationships between film genres. Yet this title symptomatically shows the Hollywood-centrism surrounding the topic, as does Barry Langford’s genre textbook’s subtitle *Hollywood and Beyond* (2005). It can be expected that more studies of cross-pollinations and dialogues between different countries in the context of genres will emerge in response to this gap in scholarship (Grant 2007, 107-108). This thesis contributes to this growing field.

Despite their diverse origins, there has been a significant lack of in-depth cross-cultural comparisons of network films. Furthermore, few have considered how, as a global group, network films might contest categorical concepts such as Hollywood, world cinema and art cinema. Some analyses do consider international examples, but they tend to concentrate on the films’ individual nationalities rather than comparing the cross-over relationships (Locke 2007; Everett 2005, 163-4). More often articles on non-American films mention American examples. Reviews and articles on American network films only rarely mention non-American examples, and the authors do not often conduct comparative cross-cultural analyses. This supports the binary perception of Hollywood’s global dominance and the rest of the world’s cinemas’ otherness to Hollywood.

Although Bordwell (2008a) provides a study of network films from a wide range of countries, instead of investigating the challenge to categories and definitions that this international group of films might put into effect, he reiterates perceived divisions between such categories as art cinema, Hollywood, and independent cinema. Throughout his chapter Bordwell describes the films as engaging in processes of innovation. He claims “many features of classical construction [such as goal oriented narratives] find their way into degrees-of-separation narratives, whether made in Hollywood or other countries” (219). He also states that “[a]ll the constructive principles governing art cinema can be deployed in network tales too” (219). Together these statements suggest a significant narrative overlap between such categories. Yet Bordwell makes the latter statement in relation to European and Asian “art” films, but

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3 Bordwell lists these principals as “Loose causal connections, diffuse or abandoned goals, interplays of fantasy and reality, unreliable and ambiguous narration, inconclusive endings, and innovations in visual and auditory technique” (2008, 219).
does not investigate how such art cinema principles may apply to examples from Hollywood. Furthermore, for Bordwell it seems that despite cross-cultural influences the different industries principally maintain their borders and compete with one another, showing “an artistic arms race in action” (2008a, 191). His claims echo a perception that network films from around the world either conform to or reject Hollywood conventions. He suggests that mainstream films follow Hollywood models closely, that “U.S. independent film, rather than challenging the classical tradition…has developed deeper or ‘quirkier’ (the favorite word) variants of tendencies” (218). He also suggests that the Dutch film *Any Way the Wind Blows* (Barman 2003) exhibits an “inconclusiveness [that] is typical of European and Asian network movies” (220). Therefore Bordwell perceives divisions between Hollywood, American independent and international movies synonymous with their national industries. Evidently, he has drawn these conclusions from a broad survey of international network films. However, it is my contention that network films’ potential to challenge perceived film categories needs to be addressed more closely in order to do the complex topics of world cinema and art cinema justice.

Some scholars have considered the issue of whether network films blur categorical concepts, although they do so in relation to only one or two films at a time. Some have debated whether *Babel* is a Hollywood or an arthouse film or a mixture of both industries and narrative elements (Hassapopoulou 2008; Kerr 2010). Others argue that network films such as *Babel* and *He’s Just Not That Into You* represent a new Hollywood fluidity between mainstream and arthouse markets and narrative techniques (Cameron 2008, 5). In fact, Allan Cameron critiques Bordwell’s perception that the narrative innovations of Hollywood network films are an example of the industry’s hegemonic appropriation of art cinema techniques. He writes that examples of such narratives are closely related to these examples of ‘art cinema’. Indeed, the Hollywood examples are both inside and outside mainstream cinema, which continues to produce, as a rule, traditionally conceived and executed stories. In this respect, then, I disagree with Bordwell’s contention that ‘offbeat storytelling’ has become ‘part of business as usual’ in Hollywood. (5)
Cameron’s statement shows that the question of whether network films blur the boundaries of categories such as “art cinema” and “Hollywood” deserves close attention.

One particular article stands out as an illuminating foray into a conception of network films as an internationally related group of films. In drawing on Bordwell and discussing *Babel*, Paul Kerr (2010) expands the usual genealogy that commentators chart when discussing network films. European cinema as a cohesive body is occasionally invoked as an influence underlying the fragmentary and open-ended narratives being seen in American films (Everett 2005, 159; Denby 2007; Bordwell 2008a, 201). Kerr sketches out genealogies of network narratives for three of the four nationalities *Babel* portrays. He cites Japanese examples *Rashômon, Souls on the Road* (Murata 1921), the Egyptian film *Cairo Station* (Chahine 1958), the Latin American *Midaq Alley* (Fons 1995) and European examples such as *Edge* and Kieslowski’s *Three Colours* trilogy (38-9, 46). This approach offers to forestall canonising European and auteur filmmaking (see Shohat and Stam 1994; Elsaesser 2005, 494). It presents a way of seeing these films from different countries as components of broad national and international projects of narratives and fiction. Kerr compellingly argues that it was, among other things, the globalizing of national art cinemas – through festivals, co-productions, international distribution networks and the accelerating movement of diasporic talent – which contributed to the mainstreaming of network narratives in the 1990s. (46)

As explained presently, this view of world cinema as a complex network of influences rather than simply oppositional, Hollywood-centric relationships is one which I practise throughout my comparative studies. Within this thesis I compare a wide variety of films, whereas most articles typically limit their analysis to two or three European and American films. This comparative study accordingly addresses notions of world cinema that are under debate at present in film studies.

In choosing seven “art film” case studies I also explore the implications of such notions surrounding categorical concepts of “world cinema”. In their analyses of network films Azcona (2010) uses international comparisons, Bordwell (2008a) points to international flows, and Kerr (2010) charts a range of intertexts. These texts signal a potential for network films to be seen as an internationally related group that challenges
common perceptions of categorical concepts such as “art cinema”, “world cinema” and “mainstream cinema”. Yet for different reasons this literature does not explore such potential to a full extent or in relation to more than one or two films in-depth. My study explores the implications of this potential in regard to a perceived group of “art films”, discussing the extent to which they compare in their use of distinct network narrative devices and ideologies. The fact that reviewers more often compare non-American network films with American examples and/or examples that gained Academy Award attention, as opposed to non-USA films that were highly recognised elsewhere, shows that there is a strong awareness of the American examples of network films much more than those of other backgrounds. This thesis seeks to balance such a bias through a cross cultural comparison of suitable variety, contextual depth and analysis of textual politics.

**Network Films and World Cinema**

The fact that the seven case studies have been produced contemporaneously around the world encourages an analytical approach to genre that is not Hollywood-centric or national-centric as are many of the above reviews. It is clear that network films are common throughout the world’s cinemas (see Bordwell 2008a, 245-250). But discussing world cinema is a complex business. The term “world cinema” is vague and has been used in many different ways. Linguistically “world cinema” seems to mean cinema from around the world. However, the term has come to be associated with a range of problematic meanings. Most importantly it connotes national cinemas other than Hollywood, which seems to view Hollywood as impenetrable, imperialistic and remote from the influences of other cinemas. Lúcia Nagib (2006) observes that

> [h]owever common it has become, the term ‘world cinema’ still lacks a proper, positive definition. Despite its all-encompassing, democratic vocation, it is not usually employed to mean cinema worldwide. On the contrary, the usual way of defining it is restrictive and negative, as ‘non-Hollywood cinema’. (30)

This is a notion that has come under scrutiny with the rise of transnationalism in cinema and more generally, thanks to the effects of globalisation (see Chaudhuri 2005, 6-7; 2005).
Higbee and Lim 2010, 9; Halle 2008, 6; Crofts 1993, 26; Elsaesser 2005, 499-511). As explained earlier, the fact that network films are made in different countries makes me curious as to whether they can be termed a global form. This raises the question of how the films relate to the term “world cinema”.

Originally I planned to divide this whole thesis according to geographic and industrial borders, having a chapter on European films, American independent films, Indonesian films, and so forth. However, this is not an approach which accommodates comparisons between films. By dividing it up this way I would have been using an approach which structurally perpetuates the differences and power inequalities between these locations and markets. As Nagib points out (2006, 31), this approach frequently orientalises, fetishises and/or marginalises cinemas outside of Hollywood, and fails to address the communications and power relationships between markets.

Scholars warn against considering national cinemas as essentialist, self-enclosed and uniform productions (Halle 2008, 26; Rosenbaum 2002, 220; Dennison and Lim 2006, 6). It is this inadequacy of the idea of national cinema as a whole that I wish to examine in relation to viewing network films as a global form. In reaction to these limitations, Nagib (2006) offers different approaches to world cinema. She suggests that:

- World cinema is simply the cinema of the world. It has no centre. It is not the other, but it is us. It has no beginning and no end, but is a global process. World cinema, as the world itself, is circulation.
- World cinema is not a discipline, but a method, a way of cutting across film history according to waves of relevant films and movements, thus creating flexible geographies.
- As a positive, inclusive, democratic concept, world cinema allows all sorts of theoretical approaches, provided they are not based on the binary perspective (35).

Transnationalism is typically defined as a relationship between two or more countries, in some cases whereby cultural identities become hybrid or blurred (Brown 2010, 17). However, as Brown details, there are many different types of transnational cinema (2010, 16), which further shows that the boundaries the term world cinema connotes are complex.

This type of organisation is one which many books on world cinema take. For instance, Traditions in World Cinema (Badley et al. 2006) contains chapters on various national cinemas, including European, South American, African, Middle Eastern, and Asian, but in relation to American cinema only addresses “The ‘New’ American Cinema” and “The Global Art of Found Footage Cinema”. Cooke’s 2007 collection World Cinema’s ‘Dialogues’ with Hollywood offers essays which discuss various national cinema’s exchanges with Hollywood, but in most cases the essays are confined to discussions of one type of national cinema.

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Nagib promotes an analysis which accounts for the circulation of films around the world as well as a method of comparative study. Her redefinitions of world cinema highlight the cross-pollinations that flow throughout cinema worldwide (33-4). Similarly, Halle (2008) warns that:

the comparativist position...is generally not concerned with comparisons between any given national cinemas but with Hollywood cinema as a form of production against which all national cinemas struggle ... If we primarily compare ‘minor’ national cinemas only with Hollywood, not only do those cinemas lose significance, but Hollywood also comes close to functioning as an empty signifier, as opposed to a place of production transformed by globalization as well. (27)

Halle’s argument is that the attempts to classify and compare national aesthetics as insular and opposed to Hollywood is an essentialising perspective that disavows Hollywood of its local specificity. This warning supports Paul Willemen’s proposal for comparative studies in world cinema (2005), in order “to find ways of overcoming the limits of any cultural relativism, any fetishization of geo-political boundaries, and to elaborate a cultural theory worthy of the name” (98). Shohini Chaudhuri (2005) relevantly remarks:

All films, regardless of whether they are classified as ‘art’ or ‘popular entertainment’, follow established aesthetic and discursive practices. One of the insights to be gained by the concept of ‘world cinema’ is that such practices, which are so often naturalised as conventions, are variable and contingent. (6-7)


Comparative literature has had a long and fruitful history, but a field of comparative film studies is only just beginning to emerge. Writing in the mid 2000s, Willemen recommends that film studies take a comparative approach to analysing films across different cultures as opposed to canonising particular national cinemas and texts, an approach that excludes and marginalises other voices. Regarding the assertion that films from non-American nations oppose or use Hollywood tactics, Willemen argues that this is a misguided view, since films from both the West and the non-West are

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7 See also Dudley Andrew’s “Time Zones and Jetlag: the Flows and Phases of World Cinema” (2010b) and Fredric Jameson’s “Globalization and Hybridization” (2010).
driven by modernisation (2005, 101). His implication is that the capitalist influences on these texts are often misread as Hollywood norms rather than a global phenomenon (103-4). By the same token he also cautions the use of analogy between films from different cultural contexts, since drawing analogies “means that it is not at all the same thing: it just looks like it in a number of ways” (106). Accordingly, when comparing and analysing examples of network films this study draws attention to local influences upon the case studies as well as observing broader analogies. In undertaking this comparative study this thesis contributes to the growing field of comparative film studies.

My investigation into the proposition that network films constitute a global genre requires the consideration of how they relate to one another within and in spite of their national borders. The fact that network films share definite similarities raises the question of whether we can think of them as a global genre. As noted above, the seven case studies are often described as “art films”. In this respect I draw on Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover’s concept of “global art cinema” (2010a). Galt and Schoonover’s 2010 book *Global Art Cinema* refers to art films which address international rather than specifically local audiences, and generally travel in international film festivals (Andrew 2010a, viii), as did the seven films I examine. Galt and Schoonover define art cinema not as a genre, nor as a body of films which rigidly oppose mainstream cinema, but “by its impurity” and “difficulty of categorization” (2010a, 6). As discussed above, the conflicts over whether Hollywood network films represent cultural imperialism or artistic innovation (see Crofts 1993, 26; Naficy 2010, 18) illustrate such a “difficulty of categorization”. Just as “mainstream” films can exhibit similar qualities to “art” films, art films can share qualities with mainstream films. I discuss such issues in more detail in Chapter Eight. Neither the paradigms of national cinema nor world cinema, nor the binary divide between art and popular cinema are individually satisfactory and unproblematic. Accordingly, my investigation in Chapter Eight into how network films relate to these paradigms questions the clarity and usefulness of the terms “national”, “transnational”, “art”, and “world” cinema in relation to the notion of a global genre.

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8 Willemen argues that the topic of globalisation be approached carefully rather than simply seeing it as a process of Americanisation, since different societies relate and respond to capitalism in different ways (2005, 103). This is important in regard to world cinema because world cinema is commonly understood to be the cinemas other than Hollywood, which sets up a binary schism between Hollywood and the rest of the world.
Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the key motivations and issues surrounding my comparative analysis of the seven network films *Babel, Love, Crash, Code Unknown, Edge, Lantana* and *Mumbai*. These reasons include: the remarkable proliferation of these types of films around the world and the disproportionate scarcity of in-depth cultural analyses of them; the desire to further analyse the films’ representations of a world full of strangers who come to signify potential friends, in distinction to the close-knit relationships in ensemble films; and the aim to answer the question of whether network films constitute a genre. An interesting issue that arises from this study is whether there can be such a thing as a global genre and how it might affect categorical notions of “world cinema” and “art cinema”, discussed further in Chapters Seven and Eight. Ahead of those chapters, I concentrate on whether network films form a genre. Chapter Two embarks upon textual analysis, providing an overview and discussion of the themes and topics of the seven films in order to determine whether network films might constitute a genre.
Chapter Two: Common Topics

This chapter serves as a general introduction to the seven case study films, their key issues and themes. In order to investigate whether or not network films constitute a genre, this chapter examines whether they have semantic and syntactic consistencies in their representations of common topics and themes. Although he does not refer to themes specifically, Rick Altman writes that “common topics” can be a generic marker (1999, 89). “Common topics” is a term which can typically denote the subject matter or the thematic messages that a text produces. For the sake of clarity I distinguish subject matter from thematic messages. I use the term “common topics” to describe the films’ subject matter as a possibly semantic factor, and “thematic messages” or “themes” to describe how the films might syntactically deal with their common topics. This is in accordance with Altman’s theory of semantics as “building blocks” such as costumes, settings, music, props and character types (1999, 219) and syntax as “constitutive relationships between…variable placeholders” (1984, 10). Altman, however, does not specify whether common topics are semantic or syntactic markers, although genre theorist Raphaëlle Moine includes themes as semantic elements (2008, 14). However, I see a distinction between common topics as semantic elements and themes as syntactic. The ambiguity as to whether common topics and themes function as semantic or syntactic factors illustrates Altman’s statement that “there is anything but general agreement on the exact frontier separating semantic from syntactic views” (1984, 10). In distinguishing common topics and themes as potentially semantic and syntactic elements I intend to bring some clarification to this issue.

Commentators have on numerous occasions noted common topics that network films share. María del Mar Azcona (2010), Wendy Everett (2005) and David Bordwell (2008a) observe a range of recurring subjects, which I contend may be classified into conceivable semantic and syntactic groupings. This is useful to determine whether and if so which of the motifs the seven films use generically.

The possible semantic group consists of recurring general topics which appear in many of the seven case studies. Likely common topics consist of:

- accidents that change the course of characters’ lives (Everett 2005, 165), raising the topic of the contingency of everyday life;
• violent encounters (165), which denote the topic of the cultural frictions of contemporary societies;
• the effects of globalisation on personal relationships (Azcona 2010, 8), as in many cases the characters’ cultural backgrounds are evidence of historical migrations while contemporary media and technology indicate that global flows are everyday aspects of the characters’ lives;
• “contrasts among social groups” (Bordwell 2008a, 200), including “disparities between rich and poor” (214);
• “contrasts between Great Events and ordinary life” (214) (although it is worth noting now that this cannot be an essential generic aspect since it is not present in each of the films);
• “problems of urban anomie” (214);
• “problems of…national differences” (214);
• “puzzles of chance and fate” and the relationship between chaos and order (214); and
• “troubled romances” and “different styles of loving” (214).

In the likely syntactic category I place the concluding messages of the films. Common topics are explored in different ways throughout the seven case studies, and this process results in their concluding messages. These thematic messages include:

• “overcoming national barriers” and “the hope that barriers can be transcended through commonalities” (213, 200);
• the sense of “life as a whole” (thanks to the diversity of narrative threads gathered together) (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197); and
• the ways in which the films “[respond] to an intense but directionless longing for community on the part of its [diegetic] inhabitants, as well as on the part of the cinematic audience” (Hsu 2006, 138).

This last point regarding how the films address the issue of community is a key focus of this thesis, and I explain why presently. To these lists I wish to note that frequently the topic of suffering pervades the narratives. It is an aspect which possibly qualifies as a semantic element and supports the syntactic construction of what I describe and discuss presently as “network community”. Notably, each character suffers
in some way, wherein the films portray a collective of sufferers. I thus contend that suffering may be both a prevalent semantic topic and syntactic theme as many network films compare characters in similar circumstances or with common issues, portraying a cohesive community despite individual differences. After explaining the term “network community” in the following section, the next section provides synopses of the films and explores whether they share common topics and thematic tropes. The latter part of this chapter also briefly discusses the importance of the theme and depiction of pluralism in the films. These discussions help to ascertain whether network films share generic semantic and syntactic elements and analyse their individual narrative politics.

The Concept of Network Community

Hsuan L. Hsu’s remark that network films “[respond] to an intense but directionless longing for community on the part of [their diegetic] inhabitants, as well as on the part of the cinematic audience” (2006, 138) is a key theme which I argue defines network films, regardless of whether or not they constitute a genre. Some scholars claim that network films place a strong emphasis on creating cosmopolitan connections between characters (Bergfelder 2010; Barnard 2009, 208-209; Bordwell 2008a, 200, 213). I note that the theme is prevalent throughout the seven case studies and is therefore possibly a syntactic element. Notably, the theme of network community only arises when the films feature a network of disparate strangers who connect, rather than ensembles of people who already know one another and thereby form a close, rather than networked, community. This theme of network community thereby provides a distinct qualification of network films as different from ensemble films.

As noted in Chapter One, Wittel’s idea of “network sociality” informs my term “network community”. Andreas Wittel (2001) presents a key reconsideration of the term “community”. As the nineteenth century sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies describes it, “Community means genuine, enduring life together, whereas Society is a transient and superficial thing” ([1887] 2001, 19). A common criticism of contemporary life is that values and practices of community, which connote “stability, coherence, embeddedness and belonging…long-lasting ties, proximity and a common history or narrative of the collective” are disintegrating (Wittel 2001, 51, 62; Chambers 2006, 21, 102, 157; Rheingold 1994, 12). Some critics, such as Georg Simmel and Howard Rheingold, claim that there has been a “death of community” (Chambers 2006, 20-21) and blame
the “lack of trust in metropolitan life and the lack of safety of this society” as well as the “commodification of social relationships” and “urban conflict about material gain and profit” for this seeming disintegration (51-76, 53). To view it in less pessimistic words, the conditions of community that are based on sharing a common geography, history, value system, and religion (Wittel 2001, 62; Tönnies [1887] 2001, 18-19), are changing. Changes include geographic uprootedness of families, the “repositioning of ‘work as leisure’” (Chambers 2006, 118), the awareness that “communities are always constructed, never automatic, given or natural” (Nancy 1991 cited in Wittel 2001, 62), and a renewed focus on friendship, individualism, choice and “responsibility for the Other” (see Chambers 2006, 31, 161-63; Derrida 2005; Bauman 2001). The proposal that information technologies have led to “virtual communities” in the stead of “real community” that is based on common space and values also complicates the term community in recent decades. Evidently the notion of community is undergoing much change thanks to communications and travel technologies.

Wittel (2001, 51) argues that the term “community” is misleading and no longer relevant, due to the new types of casual and temporary relationships global travel and communication have brought about. He convincingly argues instead for the term “network sociality” as the paradigm which describes contemporary relationships (51). Concentrating on the blurred nature of work and leisure and the impact of travel and circulation upon professional relationships, he describes network sociality as a concept and practice which “consists of fleeting and transient, yet iterative social relations; of ephemeral but intense encounters” and that it “is not characterized by a separation but by a combination of both work and play” (62). Wittel’s point is particularly relevant to network films which convey themes of friendship, blurred public and private, work and leisure relationships, the changing nature of familial relationships, and connectivity across geographical distances.

Yet while Wittel’s term “network sociality” is useful to describe the transient but intimate nature of characters’ relationships in network films, it does not entirely capture the profundity with which these films convey characters’ connections and relationships. Network films show relationships that emerge out of networked encounters rather than from models of community based on neighbourhood, class, and racial similarities. They also create cosmopolitan connections between characters that are more personal and significant than the relationships described by Wittel’s concept of
network sociality. Network society has seen a rejuvenation of theories and philosophies of cosmopolitanism. Immanuel Kant was among the first to discuss cosmopolitanism, the idea that people have responsibility towards other people around the world in order to live in peace. In his 1784 essay “Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose”, he claims

The greatest problem for the human species ... is that of attaining a civil society which can administer justice universally. ([1784] 2010, 20, original emphasis)

In brief, the definition of cosmopolitanism is of a global concern and awareness about other people in the world, a type of universal humanism. Paul Hopper (2007) gives the dictionary definitions: “1a of or from or knowing many parts of the world. b consisting of people from many or all parts. 2 free from national limitations and prejudices” (157). Cosmopolitanism denotes an awareness of the world within which one lives and to which everyone is connected and has an impact on and relationship to other people, even though they may be distant strangers.

In recent years the increased activity and attention to globalisation and network society has inspired a number of cultural theorists to argue that various forms of cosmopolitanism have consequently bloomed (see Hopper; Beck 1992; Beck 2006; Fine 2007). Concurrently some commentators remark in passing that network films contain cosmopolitan themes (Giroux and Giroux 2007, 756; Mennel 2009, 74; Wheatley 2008, 74; Heryanto 2004, 27; Galt 2010, 231). Instances of cultural others encountering and in some cases helping one another are frequent in network films, as are sentiments of global connectedness and responsibility towards strangers. Tim Bergfelder (2010) directly relates Mica Nava’s theory of visceral cosmopolitanism (2007, 8) to Edge, as characters connect and become involved with one another actively in ways that profoundly change their lives. Whereas theories and experiences of cosmopolitanism are often criticized for being abstract and passive, Nava’s theory of visceral cosmopolitanism, describes instances in everyday life in which cosmopolitan actions take place (2007, 13). Similar relationships and thematic implications of cosmopolitanism are found in many examples of network films, including the texts

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9 Beck uses the term “banal” (2006, 41).
considered here. Thus, while network films connect characters thanks to network sociality, they often convey these connections as personal, cosmopolitan relationships.

Such cosmopolitan themes frequently infer communal relationships between characters. This explains how these abstract ties between disparate characters result in the idea of network community which I explore in relation to the character networks. Akin to Wittel’s contention (2001), themes of friendship, blurred public, private, work and leisure relationships, the changing nature of familial relationships, and connectivity across geographical distances are prevalent in network films. So is the more communal theme of cosmopolitan responsibility for others (and the cultural other). Network films represent types of “ephemeral but intense encounters” that Wittel attributes to network sociality. But they also frequently reiterate a notion of community in the fashion that is based on commonalities and proximity (Simmel [1903] 1997, 70; Rheingold 1994; Tönnies [1887] 2001). The films’ constructions of connections and relationships between characters show them “enduring life together” in ways that may be “transient” but are cosmopolitan rather than “superficial” (Tönnies [1887] 2001). This cosmopolitan communality is an aspect which is often highlighted as a quality or potentiality secretly underlying the workings of society. Characters do not know that they are part of networks, but the viewers do. This dramatic irony cites the ephemeral quality of network sociality, but also thematically constructs network communities between characters. I therefore combine the terms “network sociality” and “community” to form “network community”. This term aptly describes how characters’ diegetic relationships may be fleeting and networked yet to the minds of viewers they form significant cosmopolitan and communal relationships.

Having explained my use of the term “network community”, I now proceed to sketch out the seven case studies’ common topics. The rest of this chapter introduces readers to the seven films’ synopses, characters, topics and themes film by film. It also briefly discusses and outlines other crucial defining components of the films.
The Seven Films’ Common Topics and Themes

*Love for Share* (Di Nata 2006)

![Image](image.png)

Figure 2.1

Despite its small cast of three central characters, *Love* offers a unique imagining of social contrasts and a satire on polygamy in Indonesia. It emerged as a post New Order arthouse film which gained notoriety in Indonesia. Nia Di Nata has gained fame as an Indonesian director who tackles feminist themes and homosexuality, in this film and her previous films *Ca-bau-kan* (2002) and *Arisan!* (2003; the first Indonesian film to show two gay men kissing). As Chapter Eight discusses further, the controversy surrounding themes of feminism, homosexuality and the positive depiction of characters who had been previously marginalised in Indonesian cinema reflect common post New Order cinematic concerns. Indonesian filmmakers such as Awi Suryadi (*Claudia/Jasmine* [2008]), Enison Sinaro (*Long Road to Heaven* [2007]), and Nan Triveni Achnas (*Kuldesak* [1999], *Whispering Sands* [2001], *The Photograph* [2007]), also have addressed contentious themes such as abortion, dysfunctional young adults, the Bali bombings, prostitution, immigration and refugees. *Love*’s central topic, polygamy, is a controversial topic in Indonesia and up until 1998 was rarely shown in cinema (Kurnia 2009, pars.2-3). Indonesia is home to extremely diverse ethnicities and, while the religious majority is Muslim, polygamy is a divisive issue (Kurnia 2009, pars.16-18). *Love* depicts polygamy practised formally between Islamic people and informally amongst Chinese Catholic and secular characters.

Structured as a triptych, *Love* follows three women who are from vastly different social strata, focusing on one woman per segment. In the first we meet Salma (Jajang C.
Salma is married to a wealthy well known Muslim politician Pak Hajji (El Manik), has a son Nadim, and works as a doctor at a medical clinic for women. She discovers that Pak Hajji has taken a second wife, and tells him angrily to shower immediately every time he returns home. The film cuts to ten years later, and although still disappointed, Salma has come to tolerate Pak Hajji’s polygamy (he now has three other wives). In one scene Salma buys takeaway at a restaurant famous for its duck recipes, where Ming, the protagonist from the third segment, happens to serve Salma. This setting and the topic of polygamy provides a satirical jab at well known Indonesian pro-polygamist and restaurant chain owner Puspo Wardoyo (Kurnia 2009, para.22, fn.22). As a young adult, Nadim (popular Indonesian celebrity DJ Winky) criticises Salma’s public support of polygamy. During this time the Aceh tsunami strikes, prompting Salma and Pak Hajji to plan to travel there to offer medical and moral support, with Salma secretly planning to go independently. However, Pak Hajji has a heart attack and they remain in Jakarta. During his convalescence Salma meets and generously accommodates his other wives. Upon Pak Hajji’s deathbed he and Nadim reconcile, Pak Hajji warning Nadim to never take more than one wife. At the end of the segment Nadim travels to give aid in Aceh and Salma, now independent, is shown in the clinic treating two women, one of whom is the main subject of the second segment.

In the second segment Siti (Indonesian pop singer Shanty) is a girl from the Javanese city of Yogyakarta who moves to Jakarta to study at beauty school. She moves in with a sleazy family friend, Pak Lik, who has two wives named Dwi and Sri. This is a poor household in which the wives take it in turns to sleep with Pak Lik while the remaining wife sleeps in one crowded room with their children. Regularly helping the wives deliver and mind their children, Siti becomes a part of the family and Pak Lik asks her to marry him, to which she feels obliged to consent. During this time the tsunami strikes and Pak Lik travels for his work as a cameraman to Aceh, afterwards bringing home a fourth wife. As the time passes Siti and Dwi fall in love, secretly spending time together. While Pak Lik is away in Aceh, Siti and Sri visit Salma’s clinic to obtain birth control and medicinal treatment. Eventually Siti and Dwi run away together. In this scene, they catch a taxi out of which has just emerged the protagonist of our third thread.

The third segment follows a young Chinese Indonesian woman named Ming (fashion model Dominique). Ming works at the duck restaurant (where Salma buys
takeaway), and is having an affair with her married and wealthy Chinese Catholic employer Koh Abun (Tio Pakusodewo). Ming convinces Koh Abun to buy her a car and apartment while she is his mistress and there they spend time while Koh Abun’s wife Cik Linda travels. At one point Ming tells Koh Abun she wants to donate money to the victims of the Aceh tsunami. Ming wants to be an actress, and, encouraged by her friend Firman (Reuben Elishama), takes acting lessons. When Cik Linda discovers the affair she evicts Ming from the apartment. Ming decides to move to a cheap neighbourhood, where, exiting the taxi, she passes Siti and Dwi. Ming gives Dwi’s daughter a teddy bear that Koh Abun had presented to her bearing a fake diamond engagement ring. The film ends with Ming deciding to never be dependent on men again. The taxi driver is shown happily walking down the alleyway, performing a Charlie Chaplin-like kick in the air.

_Love_ shows many of the topics and themes listed earlier in this chapter. In terms of topics, _Love_’s three stories clearly show the element of “contrasts among social groups” (Bordwell 2008a, 200). The three women have vastly different class, ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as different sexual orientations. Their traces of historical migrations (in particular that of Chinese people into Indonesia) and contemporary cultural influences, with references to Chinese blockbusters such as _Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon_ (Lee 2000), show the topic of the effects of globalisation on personal relationships (Azcona 2010, 8). The occurrence of the Aceh tsunami in each of the three threads and the women’s different reactions illustrates the theme of “contrasts between Great Events and ordinary life” (Bordwell 2008a, 214). The tsunami and the nationally controversial topic of polygamy also suggests “problems of…national differences” (214), since the characters respond in different ways to the tsunami and polygamy is an issue which divides opinions and is shown in different contexts. To some extent there is a theme of “problems of urban anomie” (214), as characters occupy different areas of the city and experience anomie with their personal circumstances, although the urban settings are not a cause of their anomie. The film does show “troubled romances” and “different styles of loving” (214), although it specifically lampoons polygamy rather than romance itself. Violent encounters (Everett 2005, 165) are not present, although chance encounters are significant in relating the characters experiences. These points suggest that “contrasts among social groups” (Bordwell 2008a, 200), “problems of…national differences” (214), “problems of urban anomie” (214), the effects of
globalisation upon relationships, “troubled romances” (214), “different styles of loving” (214), and chance encounters may indeed constitute generic common topics.

In gathering these characters together, Love strongly shows the proposed syntactic theme of network community. Crucial to this is the way in which Salma, Siti and Ming connect to form a type of cosmopolitan community. Each of the three women react in cosmopolitan ways to the tsunami, and each of them help one another in different degrees. The commonalities of polygamy between the different narrative threads create a syntax of common experience. The ties drawn between the three women also imaginatively revise traditional notions of community, projecting meaningful connections made between a pluralistic group of people. Through Salma, Siti and Ming’s encounters, Di Nata’s film conveys a feminist message of the women’s likenesses to one another and their ability to help one another in significant ways despite their different socioeconomic and cultural positions. This works to provide a sense of “life as a whole” (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197) for women in Indonesia, and seeks to draw connections and commonalities between class and racial barriers (Bordwell 2008a, 213, 200). These themes, in conjunction with the topics noted above, suggest that, if these qualities are also prevalent in the remaining films, Love may be part of a genre of films.

**Babel (Iñárritu, 2006)**

*Babel* is famed as the Oscar-nominated third instalment in a trilogy by the Mexican writer and director team Guillermo Arriaga and Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu.\(^\text{10}\)

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\(^{10}\) Their previous two films *Amores Perros* and *21 Grams* are also network films.
Babel presents four pairs or groups of characters around the world who become remotely connected to one another. It contrasts a wealthy American couple Richard (Brad Pitt) and Susan (Cate Blanchett) who are touring in Morocco; a Mexican nanny Amelia (Adriana Barraza), who is looking after Richard and Susan’s children in their absence; a pair of Moroccan boys Yussef (Boubker Ait El Caid) and Ahmed (Said Tarchani – both Moroccan non-actors); and a deaf and mute Japanese teenage girl named Chieko (Rinko Kikuchi). When Yussef and Ahmed foolishly test out a rifle’s range on a tourist bus they happen to shoot Susan in the shoulder. Chieko’s father Yasujiro (Kôji Yakusho) gave the gun to Hassan who sold it to Yussef and Ahmed’s father. When Richard and Susan are waylaid and unable to find a babysitter for their children in America, Amelia decides to bring the children to her son’s wedding across the border in Mexico. Afterwards Amelia’s nephew Santiago (Gael García Bernal) drives them back to the American border, where he gets into a fight with the border guard, drives away and abandons Amelia and the children in the desert where Amelia desperately searches for help. In Japan Chieko, who grieves for her mother’s suicide, feels socially alienated since she is deaf and consequently seeks sexual encounters. At one point she happens to see a news report on Yussef’s arrest. The film ends with Amelia’s deportation to Mexico, Yussef’s surrender to the Moroccan police after they kill Ahmed, Richard and Susan’s safe departure for America, and Chieko and her father finding solace in an embrace on their apartment balcony.

Similar to Love, Babel features many of the common topics and themes noted earlier. Babel’s threads show a common topic of contrasting people of different backgrounds in dire circumstances, offering one of the most far-reaching assemblages of cultures and continents amongst network films.\footnote{Other far-reaching examples include One Day in Europe (Stöhr 2005), Syriaana (Gaghan 2005 [although its characters are very closely linked, almost to the extent of being an ensemble film]), Contagion (Soderbergh 2011), Kieslowski’s Three Colours trilogy, and the Russian film playing on the country’s different time zones Six Degrees of Celebration (Bekmambetov et al. 2010).} It clearly uses the topic of social contrasts, showing disparities between wealthy and poor people of different nationalities. In doing so, it also concentrates on the topic of how globalisation affects these characters’ relationships (Azcona 2010, 8). Unlike Love there is no non-fictional “Great Event” (Bordwell 2008a, 214), although it could be argued that the shooting of the American tourist in Morocco and the American government’s resulting misinformed opinion it was a terrorist act refers to a “Great Event” (214) since it is symbolic of the American victimhood and the Bush regime’s response to 9/11. The film certainly
presents its protagonists as ordinary people. To some extent the film shows “urban anomie” (214) in Chieko’s alienation in Japan, although her alienation mostly stems from her grief and the social ostracism she faces as a deaf person. The other three threads are predominantly set in non-urbanised spaces. Key to Babel is the topic of “problems of … national differences” (214), as it laments the miscommunication and lack of sympathy involved in Mexican/US border politics, the US response to 9/11, and in general the economic inequalities between the different countries it shows. Violent encounters (Everett 2005, 165) are present in Yussef’s shooting of Susan, Richard’s anger at various points, and the angry dispute between Santiago and the guard at the Mexico/US border. At one point Chieko forces a dentist’s hand onto her crotch, constituting sexual assault, although we are directed to sympathise with Chieko. Although “troubled romances” and “different styles of loving” (Bordwell 2008a, 214) are present in the narrative these are not the key focus of the film. Thus, the common topics prevalent in Babel are most importantly “contrasts among social groups” (200), “problems of…national differences” (214), the effects of globalisation on relationships, and the chance connections (rather than direct encounters) between characters.

Through its theme of global connectedness Babel advocates the theme of network community. Babel aims to provide a sense of “life as a whole” (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197), and to illustrate cosmopolitan relationships between its characters. The film is named after the biblical story of the tower of Babel in which people speaking one language try to build a tower to God (The Bible 1997 [Genesis 11: 1–9]; Tierney 2009, 110). God punishes the people’s egotism by separating their language so that they cannot understand one another. Babel aims to make a statement on the injustice of miscommunication and economic inequality between first and third world countries and in doing so, convey a global problem. It implies that, since many of the characters’ actions affect one another’s lives, if these characters were able to understand the bigger picture they would realise how they are connected to one another and this would prompt them to help one another. The humanist, cosmopolitan, and universalist message conveyed in the tagline “if you want to be understood, listen”, implies that the world’s problems would be solved if people were able to understand and listen to each other. This aims to show an unrealised but potentially utopian global, networked community. Despite Babel’s global breadth in comparison to Love, the two films share comparable common topics and themes, namely those of social contrasts, “national differences” (Bordwell 2008a, 214), connectivity, a presentation of “life as a
whole” (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197), and similarities between characters despite their class, cultural, and geographic differences, which create a sense of network community. This suggests that the two films generically present common topics and themes.

**Mumbai My Life (Kamat 2008)**

*Figure 2.3*

*Mumbai* spans a week in the lives of five strangers who at times cross each other’s paths and who each are affected by the Mumbai train bombings of July 11th, 2006. The film intercuts between five central characters: a wealthy female news reporter Rupali (Soha Ali Khan), whose fiancé dies in the bombings and whose subsequent grief is exploited by her fellow journalists; a patriotic and successful businessman Nikhil (R. Madhavan), who suffers post traumatic stress disorder after experiencing the bomb blasts; the soon to be retiring middle class policeman Patil (Paresh Rawal) who is training the young and increasingly disillusioned policeman Kadam (Vijay Maurya) and who is publically taunted for the police force’s ineffectiveness and corruption; a slum dweller Thomas (Irrfan Khan) who takes his frustration about his poverty out on the wealthy by making bomb threats to shopping malls; and an unemployed computer salesman Suresh (Kay Kay Menon) who embarks on a personal vendetta against a Muslim man named Yusuf whom Suresh believes is a terrorist responsible for the bombings. Ultimately the five characters’ experiences following the bombings lead them to self-realisations. Rupali denounces journalism; Nikhil becomes brave enough to ride trains again; Patil retires giving a speech about the history of conflict in Mumbai and the police force’s potential to gain integrity; Thomas sees an old man suffer a heart attack because of his bomb threat and feels ashamed; and Suresh learns he was mistaken about Yusuf when he discovers that Yusuf shares faith in Lord Sai Baba, a saint for both Muslims and Hindus.
As do *Love* and *Babel*, *Mumbai*’s character cross section emphasises the topic of social contrasts. Through the different characters’ threads the film critiques the degradation of the poor, the exploitative nature of the media, the inefficacy of the police force to respond to the bomb blasts ("Senior cop" 2011), corruption in the police force (Quah 2008), and xenophobia. As in *Love* and *Babel*, the topic of the effects of globalisation upon relationships is present, as *Mumbai* portrays a multicultural mix of characters and references Islamophobia in other parts of the world. Similar to *Love*’s representation of the Aceh tsunami, *Mumbai*’s concentration on the train bombings (at one point comparing them to the 9/11 attacks) illustrates the theme of “contrasts between Great Events and ordinary life” (Bordwell 2008a, 214), although as already noted this is not a generic element since it does not occur in all network films. The motif of “different styles of loving” is not foregrounded in this film, indicating that it too is not a generic element. As in *Babel* violent encounters (Everett 2005, 165) are present as, for instance, Suresh’s abuse of an elderly Muslim man leads to a fight with Patil and Kadam. The violence of the bombings also links all the characters, particularly Nikhil and Suresh who sit near one another in the chaotic aftermath. As a topic these violent encounters highlight the vulnerability and volatility of Mumbai’s multiculturalism. However, as noted in relation to *Love*, violent encounters are not present in all network films and this aspect is therefore not a recurrent generic element, although in *Mumbai*’s case it does underscore the topic of social contrasts. The topic of “urban anomie” (Bordwell 2008a, 214) is present in *Mumbai*, as few of the characters enjoy life in the city until the film’s final moments. The topic of the chance nature of characters’ encounters and connections is similar to those in *Love* and *Babel*, which suggests that this is a recurring semantic factor. Thus, in the topics of social contrasts, relationships affected by globalisation, to some extents “urban anomie” (214), and significant chance encounters, the three films so far discussed are convergent, intimating that these three topics are generic.

As do *Love* and *Babel*, *Mumbai* conveys a key theme of network community. The film presents a portrait of the city that critiques social inequalities but emphasises the characters’ common sense of belonging to the city. It draws connections between characters through its editing devices, the instances in which their paths collide, and generally in the commonality of suffering between all the characters. As do the characters in *Love* and *Babel*, *Mumbai*’s characters each suffer desperation, unhappiness
and self-doubt. These common emotions draw connections throughout the network, their social contrasts but shared experiences creating a sense of “life as a whole” (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197). The film also significantly critiques the false or “banal” sense of cosmopolitanism that the journalistic media conveys (Beck 2006, 19). Rupali’s fiancé points out that the cosmopolitan “help” she brings to abused women in the form of a news report is only fleeting and artificial, and is an exploitative news story. When Rupali turns her back on this mode of journalism in the finale, her decision to stand with other people rather than in front of a camera reiterates this critique, emphasising a communal responsibility to join with rather than exploit citizens. A theme of “transcending barriers through commonalities” (Bordwell 2008a, 200, 213) is used to help emphasise, as in Babel and Love, that people could ideally work through their problems together if they realised their part in social networks. Ultimately the film praises the city’s communal spirit, as the characters each experience hardships but come to realise during the two minutes’ silence for the victims of the bombing that they are part of the community that surrounds them all the time. Much like Love and Babel, the semantics of cultural diversity and the syntax which brings characters together in communal and cosmopolitan bonds underscore Mumbai’s portrait of a network community.

The Edge of Heaven (Akin 2007)

Edge is a triptych which concentrates on six characters who represent various aspects of Turkish German transnational relationships. In the first main segment intertitled “Yeter’s death” we meet Nejat (Baki Davrak), a second generation Turkish German man teaching German literature at the Hamburg University. His father Ali (veteran Turkish actor Tuncel Kurtiz) presumably came to Germany as a guestworker during the 1960s. Ali pays Yeter (Nurser Köse), a Turkish prostitute who moved to
Germany from Turkey within the past twenty years, to live with him. However, one evening Ali drunkenly slaps Yeter and she falls, hits her head and dies, leaving Ali to be imprisoned and Nejat to travel to Turkey to track down Yeter’s family and daughter Ayten.

In the second segment “Lotte’s death”, it is revealed that Ayten (Nurgül Yesilçay) is involved in a political activist party. She becomes an illegal immigrant when she flies to Germany to search for her mother and apparently overstays her visa. Ayten meets and stays with a young upper middle class German woman Lotte (Patrycia Ziolkowska) and her mother Susanne (Hannah Schygulla, known for her roles in New German cinema, particularly those about resistance and complicity in Nazi Germany, and racism towards guestworkers). Susanne is reluctant to host an illegal immigrant, but supports her daughter. Lotte and Ayten fall in love. One night Lotte and Ayten are pulled over for a minor police check, but Ayten panics and draws attention to herself. This leads to her detention and legal plea for asylum which Susanne finances. Eventually, Ayten is deported to Turkey. Lotte moves to Turkey to find her and happens to rent a room from Nejat. After Susanne withdraws her financial support, Lotte finds Ayten at a prison. Ayten asks Lotte to fetch a gun she had hidden earlier. Lotte agrees, but while walking with the gun in her bag a group of street urchins steal her bag and, not expecting it to be loaded, fatally shoot Lotte.

The third segment “Edge” opens with Susanne arriving in Turkey to grieve for Lotte’s death. At the airport she happens to stand beside Ali, who is being released from his prison sentence. Susanne meets Nejat and they spend time together. Susanne, who in her youth had been to Istanbul on her way to India (where Lotte had recently trekked), finds solace in being re-acquainted with the city and Turkish food and drink, helps Nejat run the bookstore, and extends her aid to Ayten as Lotte had wished to do. Ayten is released from prison on the condition that she repent her activism, and she and Susanne find mutual respect and friendship. After reflecting with Susanne on the fact that Ali had once told him he would defy God to protect him, Nejat sets out to the Black Sea coast to find Ali who is out fishing. The last scene shows Nejat on the beach waiting for his father’s return.

This Turkish German film shares much in common with Love, Babel and Mumbai. As in those films, Edge shows the common topics and events of social
contrasts in characters’ cultural backgrounds and economic positions, chance encounters, the effects of globalisation on relationships (Azcona 2010, 8), and “national differences” (Bordwell 2008a, 214). “[N]ational differences” (214) is a key theme as Edge negotiates Turkish German relationships. Concurrently with the film’s making Turkey had entered into talks regarding its accession to the European Union. The film illustrates the topic of the effect of globalisation on relationships, through its themes of Turkish German transnationalism, and mentions of places and events such as the 1978 riots at Kahramanmaras, the 1986 nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl and “international crises” situate the film within the context of worldwide historical and geographic transitions/flows. Edge does not use the topic of “contrasts between Great Events and ordinary life” (214) since it is entirely fictional. And although its representation of a lesbian relationship is a welcome contrast to the predominance of heterosexual relationships in cinema, it does not present “different styles of loving” (214) as its central topic. The film does frame characters as alienated in particular urban environments, reflecting their “urban anomie” (214), although this is not explicitly addressed. Similar to Babel and Mumbai, violent encounters (Everett 2005, 165) are significant in Edge, but as Love illustrates, the motif is not a recurring element in all network films. Thus, it can be said that Edge gives further weight to the claim that the common topics of social contrasts, the effect of globalisation on relationships (Azcona 8), chance encounters, and (to varying degrees in different films) “national differences” (Bordwell 2008a, 214) constitute generic semantic elements of network films.

As in the three films already explored, Edge exhibits a key theme of network community. Edge’s main theme is of the necessity of understanding and cooperation between Turkey and Germany, and to a broader extent the European Union. Throughout Edge commonalities and unusual relationships are drawn between the six characters that convey transnational, viscerally cosmopolitan relationships, as Bergfelder argues (2010). Each of the three pairs of parents and children become separated from one another (either by death or ostracism), visual symmetries show characters occupying the same spaces at different times as, for instance, we see matching shots of Yeter and Lotte’s coffins being unloaded and loaded into aeroplanes in Istanbul, and characters pass one another without realising their connections. Many of the characters meet and help one another during the film, forming new relationships and cosmopolitan bonds. These transnational relationships transcend national and cultural barriers (Bordwell 2008a, 213, 200), resulting in the theme of network community. These themes, similar
to those in the four films already described, suggest that network films share common ground, possibly enough to be termed a genre.

*Code Unknown: Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys* (Haneke 2000)

*Code Unknown* follows five central characters who collectively represent controversial conflicts between classes and cultures in Europe. These types of tensions within the EU and the theme of miscommunication are common traits of Haneke’s films. Prefaced by a deaf girl playing an unsuccessful game of charades with her peers, *Code Unknown* opens with a scene in which a white French boy, Jean, happens to meet Anne (Juliette Binoche), the girlfriend of his older brother Georges (Thierry Neuvic), walking along a street and asks if he can stay with her. While Anne is in a shop Jean throws rubbish into the lap of a Romanian beggar named Maria (Romanian theatre and screen actress Luminita Gheorghiu). A passing second generation French African man, Amadou (Ona Lu Yenke), attempts to make Jean apologise to the beggar. An argument ensues and erupts into physical violence. In a demonstration of racial prejudice, the police arrest Amadou but let Jean go. Over the course of the film similar moments of confrontation, distress, doubt and empathy unfold in these and other characters’ lives. We see Anne acting in films and struggling at an audition. She has a changeable attitude to her boyfriend Georges, a photojournalist who travels frequently, and we see them fight and appear happy together in short spaces of time. Jean runs away a few times from his father (German actor Josef Bierbichler). This drives the father, a farmer of very few words (whom Anne and Georges unsuccessfully try to comfort), into a depression since neither of his sons wish to inherit his farm. Meanwhile Amadou and his family struggle with their outsider status in France as, for instance, his younger brother is bullied, his mother laments to an African doctor about her children’s lack of a sense of belonging in either France or Africa, and his father abandons the family to return to Mali. And Maria, after being deported to Romania and being involved with family
events such as a wedding and buying a house, decides to once again illegally immigrate to Paris. Of note, one near final scene shows a young Arab man verbally abuse Anne on a train, at which point an older Arab man defends her and reprimands the younger man. In the final scenes we see that Anne has locked Georges out from her apartment without explanation, Maria looks for a space to beg on the same boulevard on which we first saw her, and Amadou helps to lead a public drumming performance by the deaf children we saw in the prologue. A continuation of the prologue’s scene of the deaf children’s charades is presented as an epilogue.

As in all the films so far discussed, Code Unknown’s key common topics and events concern social contrasts and chance encounters between characters. Code Unknown’s contrasting characters provide a thematic focus on multiculturalism in France. While not a recurrent generic motif as already noted, the violent encounter (Everett 2005, 165) at Code Unknown’s outset and other violent or conflict-ridden encounters throughout it are a significant component of the film as they illustrate the volatility of the European Union’s ambition for multicultural harmony. Problems of “national differences” (Bordwell 2008a, 214) is a central topic throughout Code Unknown, illustrated by Amadou’s family’s dilemma about whether and/or where they “belong”. It shows through this diverse range of characters the effects of globalisation upon social demographics as well as the effects of global media technology on its characters’ lives (a topic personified by the photojournalist Georges). Unlike some of the other films already covered, Code Unknown does not place central interest on characters’ different styles of loving, although their relationships are certainly important. Neither does it use the motif of “Great Events” in contrast to ordinary lives (214). Showing the popular but not generically repeated topic of “urban anomie” (214), Code Unknown places a strong emphasis on characters’ anomie in both urban and rural environments. Chance encounters are also significant, as they realistically infer the likelihood of such connections in other settings and highlight the conflict involved in this multicultural European context. Thus, similar to Love, Babel, Mumbai and Edge, Code Unknown shows the common topics of social contrasts, the effects of globalisation upon relationships (Azcona 2010, 8), and chance encounters, very strongly implying that these are generic to network films.

Although Code Unknown does not end as optimistically as do the other six case studies, it does crucially construct and address the theme of network community. It
depicts a commonality of individual isolation and miscommunication between its characters. Through character similarities, connections and encounters, *Code Unknown* questions the possibility of community. As noted above, the film dwells on hostilities, allegiances and trepidations felt by these characters who have unequal purchase in French society. At the same time, it shows fleeting cosmopolitan interactions, as in the Arab man’s defence of Anne and Amadou’s defence of Maria’s dignity at the films outset. The temporary and rare occurrence of these encounters underscores the film’s questioning address of whether community amongst European citizens is a superficial notion. This portrait conveys an allegory for “life as a whole” (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197) in multicultural societies, as do the other films discussed. The theme of transcending barriers (Bordwell 2008a, 213, 200) is implicit throughout, as the film questions whether the national and cultural borders have indeed been transcended by or persist within the European Union. Although *Code Unknown* presents a more ambiguous conclusion about network community than the other films, barring *Babel*’s lament, it conveys the theme of network community as do the other films. This implies that these films share a generic thematic syntax as well as semantic common topics.

**Lantana (Lawrence 2001)**

The central theme that runs throughout *Lantana* is of the damage that mistrust and miscommunication can do to intimate relationships and friendships. *Lantana* is set in Sydney and charts the lead up and investigation into a woman named Valerie’s disappearance. It too presents a cross section of characters, this time of working to upper middle class Australians: one of whom is Aboriginal; some of whom are white Australian; some of whom are from more recent immigrant backgrounds; and one of whom is American. Jane (Rachael Blake) is an Anglo woman separated from her husband Pete (Glenn Robins). She is having an affair with a married man, Leon (played by Anthony LaPaglia who is of Italian and Dutch heritage and is known for his
American film and television roles). Leon is married to Sonja (Kerry Armstrong), and their marriage is suffering, due to Leon’s apparent depression and Sonja’s unspoken suspicion that Leon is having an affair. Sonja is seeing an American psychiatrist, Valerie (Barbara Hershey), whose corpse we see tangled in the lantana weed in the first scene. Lantana is a plant imported from South America and has been classified as a weed in Australia. It symbolically signifies the multiple waves of immigration in Australia and resulting intercultural conflicts. Valerie lives with her husband John (Geoffrey Rush, an Australian actor well known for roles in American and British films), who is a law professor. Their marriage is suffering because of their conflicting ways of grieving for their young daughter’s death (she was murdered a few years ago). Valerie has another patient named Patrick (Peter Phelps) who is gay and having an affair with a married man.

One night Jane sees her neighbour Nik (played by Greek Australian Vince Colosimo) return home late and throw a woman’s shoe into the bushes. Jane’s neighbours Nik and Paula (Italian Australian actress Daniela Farinacci) are a young couple struggling to make ends meet, with three young children and Nik unemployed. When Jane learns about Valerie’s disappearance on the news she calls the police. Leon happens to be the police officer assigned to the case, along with Claudia, an Aboriginal woman. During the course of the investigation, Leon learns that his wife Sonja was Valerie’s patient and he listens to Sonja’s tapes which reveal her suspicions of his affair. At different points Leon suspects Patrick and John of murdering Valerie, Jane tells the police about Nik and the shoe, and Nik confesses that one night he gave Valerie a lift. On seeing that Nik was drunk and on misinterpreting his intentions upon taking a short cut, Valerie had thrown herself out of his car and into the bush. Her death was therefore not a murder, but an accident, since she stumbled over a cliff in the dark. At the end of the film many characters are left isolated or insular, with their familial relationships and friendships mostly dissipated or on unsteady grounds. After Nik’s confession, he and Paula return home with their neighbourly trust in Jane broken. Jane once more turns her ex husband Pete away. Patrick is shown forlornly watching his lover eating ice cream with his family. John mourns for his wife’s and daughter’s deaths. Leon and Sonja tentatively reunite, dancing without speaking to a Spanish tango from their dance class.

*Lantana* demonstrates the topics of social contrasts and chance encounters which have so far proved prominent in *Love, Babel, Mumbai, Edge* and *Code Unknown*. 
Similar to the question of the “New Europe” in *Edge* and *Code Unknown*, through its social contrasts *Lantana* addresses the question of cultural identity and multicultural harmony in Australia. Problems of “national differences” (Bordwell 2008a, 214) are conveyed insofar as they are embodied in the conflicts of the multicultural cross section. The suffering relationships and suspicions of neighbours and friends involved in this large social cross section illustrate tensions underlying the popular national rhetoric of the harmonious community of multicultural Australia. Chance and violent encounters (Everett 2005, 165), accidents, and coincidental connections play a large part in *Lantana*, for instance, in Valerie’s death, her brief abuse of Pete on a crowded street, and Leon’s violent treatment of Patrick and his suspects. “[U]rban anomie” (Bordwell 2008a, 214) is a secondary aspect in the film, as each of the characters are unhappy, although this has more to do with their relationships than their urban environment. Global influences (Azcona 2010, 8) are inferred in the concentration on multicultural Australian relationships, most evidently signalled by the presence of the American woman, the Aboriginal woman, and the titular imported weed. *Lantana* therefore has much in common topically with the films already discussed, showing that the effects of globalisation on relationships is a common topic alongside that of social contrasts. Along with the five other films discussed, social contrasts, the effects of globalisation upon relationships, and chance encounters appear to be contenders for generic common topics.

As in the other five films examined above, *Lantana* fosters the theme of network community. Relationships and encounters link the characters in ways that profoundly affect their lives even though the characters are mostly strangers to one another. Trust and miscommunication are key themes in *Lantana*, similar to *Code Unknown* and *Babel*. Most importantly, in showing both recognised and unwitting connections between characters, *Lantana* places them in a communal relationship, even though mutual animosities come to the surface. Similar to *Code Unknown* and *Babel*, *Lantana* is ultimately ambiguous about the extent to which community is successful amongst these characters despite their connections. Yet the centrality of this theme to the film and its message of the fragility of Australian multiculturalism indicates that, as in the other five films, network community is an important and probably generic theme.
The film with the largest social cross section considered here is *Crash*. It opens with a scene in which the black detective Grahame (Don Cheadle) and his Hispanic (romantic and professional) partner Ria (Jennifer Esposito) realise their car has crashed into that of a Korean woman, Kim Lee (Alexis Rhee). We later find out that Kim Lee is married to a people smuggler named Ken Ho (Art Chudabal). While Ria and Kim Lee argue, Grahame walks over to their destination, a crime scene whose corpse is not yet shown. The film then returns to the day before this scene, and traces the events leading up to and beyond it.

We meet Persian corner store owner Farhad (Shaun Toub), who is frustrated at the language barrier as he tries to buy a gun from a racist store owner, and his American-accented daughter Dorri (Bahar Soomekh), who angrily mediates the interaction, finally purchasing the gun and bullets. Next we cut to the young black men Anthony (Ludacris) and Peter (Larenz Tate), who hijack the black Lincoln Navigator of wealthy white couple Rick (Brendan Fraser) and Jean (Sandra Bullock). Anthony and Peter happen to run over Ken Ho as he is unlocking his white van, and they dump him outside a hospital. As a result of the hijacking Jean demands their house’s locks be changed and angrily accuses the locksmith and family man Daniel (Michael Peña) of being a gang member because he is Mexican. Rick tells Jean she is being irrational, yet proceeds to show that he too racially profiles people. Meanwhile the white police officers Tom (Ryan Phillippe), who is idealistic, and John (Matt Dillon), whom we have previously seen being discriminatory towards black health insurance officer Shaniqua (Loretta Devine), pull over another black Lincoln Navigator. Despite realising it is not the vehicle Anthony and Cameron stole, John decides to pull it over because he sees a
pale skinned black woman Christine (Thandie Newton) giving fellatio to her darker skinned husband Cameron (Terence Howard). While Tom and Cameron look away in shame and fear, John runs his hands up Christine’s dress, molesting her. Afterwards, Christine and Cameron fight and Tom alerts his superior to John’s misconduct, but is told the only reparation is for him to use a separate car.

Meanwhile, Grahame visits his drug addled mother and investigates a case in which a white police officer shot a black police officer who had probably been dealing drugs. Farhad tracks Daniel down and shoots at him because he believes it is Daniel’s fault his store got vandalised, not understanding that Daniel told him he could not fix his lock. It turns out Dorri had purchased blanks for the gun, so no one is injured. A while later, after giving Rick and Jean’s car to a Russian black market dealer, Anthony hijacks Cameron’s car. Cameron and Anthony argue while speeding through a quiet neighbourhood, and police officers corner them. Tom happens to be one of these police officers and defends Cameron, letting him go free while Anthony remains hidden. Meanwhile John risks his life to save Christine from a burning car.

Later that evening Peter hitchs a ride from Tom, but Tom wrongly suspects Peter of holding a gun and pre-emptively shoots him, dumps his body in a scrub area beside the highway, and burns his car. Cameron later happens to stop at the resulting bonfire, where he makes up with Christine on the phone. Grahame is blackmailed by a lawyer, Flanagan, into falsely testifying on his investigation to make it seem as if the white police officer was at fault. Ironically, Flanagan’s blackmail rests on the threat of exposing the criminal activities of Grahame’s brother, but we discover that the corpse at the film’s beginning was none other than Peter, Grahame’s brother. Grahame’s mother, upon witnessing Peter’s body at the hospital (where Dorri happens to work), blames Grahame for Peter’s death. In the last few scenes, Kim Lee finds Ken Ho in hospital and cashes a check for him, which is for illegal immigrants in his white van. Meanwhile Anthony finds these people and sets them free. The concluding scene shows Shaniqua crashing into another person’s vehicle, implying that similar stories and connections will unfurl endlessly.

*Crash*’s concentration on a large social cross section which is thoroughly bound up in racial conflict recalls the topics of cultural tensions and social contrasts in all the films considered above. Once again, in its multicultural cross section of characters the
topic of the effects of globalisation upon relationships (Azcona 2010, 8) is present. As in *Code Unknown, Lantana, Mumbai* and *Edge*, violent encounters (Everett 2005, 165) throughout *Crash* highlight social problems. Nevertheless, the irregularity of violent encounters amongst these films shows it is not a central generic common topic. Nor is there a particular “Great Event” (Bordwell 2008a, 214) which affects ordinary lives, although the violence between white police officers and black characters that take place in Los Angeles’ downtown and suburban streets recall the police corruption and racial violence involved in the Rodney King beating of 1991. “[U]rban anomie” (214) is a topic which *Crash* addresses directly, as characters appear lonely in the urban settings and Grahame explicitly states that people in the city miss the “sense of touch” that is lost when people move in vehicles rather than walking. The topic of problems of “national differences” (214) is present in the prevalence of racism and multicultural conflicts. Once again as in *Edge* and *Mumbai*, although many of *Crash*’s characters are in relationships the topic of different styles of loving is not foregrounded. Thus, it can be said that *Crash*, as do the other six films, focuses on the common topics of social contrasts, the influences of globalisation upon relationships (Azcona 8), and chance encounters. Accordingly, these common topics appear to be generic semantic elements.

The links between characters in *Crash* form one of the strongest portraits of community amongst the seven films, arguably matched by *Edge* and *Mumbai*. Violent encounters (Everett 2005, 165) are the basis of characters’ connections in *Crash*, forming a network community out of characters, who all experience and perpetrate racism in various forms. Despite the tensions and violence of these links, *Crash* concludes with the implication that these connections are what make Los Angeles beautiful despite its social problems. It conveys the theme of “life as a whole” (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197), a recurring theme in the seven network films. Additionally *Crash* implies that if only characters were to understand their connections they would be able to transcend hostile barriers and realise their part in a network community. Thus, the closely related themes of network community, “life as a whole” (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197) and the question of whether cultural barriers can be transcended (Bordwell 2008a, 213, 200) are crucial aspects of *Crash*. *Crash* evidently shares these key thematic similarities as well as common topics with *Love, Babel, Mumbai, Edge, Code Unknown* and *Lantana* which strongly indicates that the seven films are part of a genre.
A Genre, Possibly?

It is clear from the above findings that of the topics and themes commentators have observed in network films a certain few are recurrent in the seven case studies and are thereby arguably generic. The common topics of social contrasts, the influences of globalisation upon relationships, and chance encounters, and the themes of transcending barriers (Bordwell 2008a, 213, 200), “life as a whole” (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197), and network community are present in all of the seven network film case studies. It is my contention that these are well defined indicators that network films constitute a genre.

The fact that each of the network films discussed has a specific cultural and social cross section and relates to specific local themes could be seen, however, to threaten the integrity of the proposition that network films constitute a genre. This is because, as discussed in Chapter One (35), genres are often perceived as local responses to or originating contexts of generic practices (Moine 2008, 190-192). Network films are indeed representative of specific local circumstances. The message of women’s need for liberation from patriarchal societies and practices is prevalent in Love since Indonesia has a large percentage of practicing polygamists (Imanjaya 2009). Mumbai relates to a very specific nationally traumatic event and local Hindu/Muslim relationships. The interactions between the French, Germans, and immigrants in Code Unknown and Edge articulate the European Union’s uncertainty and debates about its multinational relationships. A different heritage of immigration is visible in Lantana’s portrait of Australia. Crash relates to Los Angeles’ renown as a turbulent multicultural city. And Babel refers to themes surrounding the Iraq war and United States/Mexico border politics. The films clearly express nationally and/or locally specific and relevant concerns.

Yet each of these films deal with similar or related topics and themes in comparable ways that indicate generic semantics and syntax. This supports the argument that genres need not be seen as culturally exclusive. Indeed, genres such as Westerns and Horror films have been produced in multiple countries and have circulated worldwide for decades. Yet often such genres’ non-American examples are labelled with specific national identifiers such as “J-Horror”, “Australian Westerns”, “Spaghetti Westerns”, and “Kiwi Gothic”, the implication being that these genres are
originally American. In contrast, as explained above, network films are seen to have a range of international originating influences. Network films thus both textually and as products represent a more interrelated and complex expression of global exchange and connection. The recurring topics and themes in network films of contrasting social groups and the question of whether commonalities can transcend barriers (Bordwell 2008a, 213, 200) underscore notions of new socialities. Each of these films critique socioeconomic inequalities, prejudices and social divisions, and contemplate the notion that communication between people of different backgrounds might help to cross these boundaries. Evident in all these films is Azcona’s argument that network films show the effects of globalisation on personal relationships and “cultural changes in intimate matters” (2010, 8). They each tackle issues of multiculturalism, international relations and transnationalism. Such recurring topics and themes illustrate the broad yet analogous effects that global travel, immigration histories and policies, media developments, terrorist networks, and other effects of globalisation have had upon different countries in the last few decades. As shown above, these topics and themes recur throughout the seven films, each of which dwells on the theme of network community. It is on these grounds that at this early stage I deem it possible that network films constitute a genre with the distinct factor of strangers whose lives collide, often unwittingly yet in each case with the implication that they form a network community. The following section briefly develops some of the narrative and analytical implications of these topics and themes in preface to their further examination throughout this thesis.

Pluralism and Polyphony

As this chapter has illustrated, unlike single protagonist films or ensemble films, network films concentrate on how different characters experience particular social issues. Bordwell’s claims that network films feature “[c]ontrasts among social groups” and “problems of “urban anomie” (2008a, 214) and “national differences” (214) in order to portray “life as a whole” (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197) are crucial components in each of the films. What is of particular note in this configuration of topics and themes is that the films give voice and narrative centrality to multiple characters. In this respect network films advocate a pluralistic approach to narrative. Azcona notes this when she writes
By easily moving between different characters and storylines of similar narrative importance, these texts refuse to offer a monolithic view of events but rather favor the portrayal of several, and sometimes contradictory, points of view. (33)

This pluralistic format offers an interesting counter to single or dual protagonist narratives, providing much more scope for the exploration of complexity.

In order to analyse the seven films’ degrees of pluralism throughout the remainder of this thesis, I draw on Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of narrative polyphony. Bakhtin’s discussions on polyphony in the works of Dostoevsky in his book Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics (1973) has been one of the most important explorations of pluralism in fiction. Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony describes the ways in which the textual voices of the characters and author dialogically relate to one another. Polyphony is a term that derives from musical terminology describing music in which many voices are heard. Bakhtin applies the term polyphony to narrative to describe a “plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” (1973, 4, original emphasis). Narratively speaking, each character’s voice is perceived to have “equal value” even though the characters’ “full-fledged consciousnesses” and “accents” are “heterogenous” and “[c]ontradictory” (12). Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky manages to present these plural voices as polyphonic rather than subject to a “unified monological authorial consciousness” (12). In other words Bakhtin perceives Dostoevsky’s work to present a thoroughly pluralistic view of characters rather than subordinating them to a single authorial point of view. As noted in the Introduction (7), the theory of polyphony is helpful to measure and understand the varying ways in which network films treat the multiple voices of their characters. Some films have strong authorial voices and structures which subordinate characters’ voices to singular themes, conveying a “monological whole” (Bakhtin 1973, 6). Others allow the characters’ voices to exist and conflict without being subsumed by an authorial message, conveying stronger degrees of polyphony. I thus draw on the term polyphony hereafter to describe such narrative workings.

12 A study of how Bakhtin’s full gloss of theoretical terms such as “heteroglossia” and “dialogism” apply to network films would be fascinating, but is beyond the scope of this thesis. The focus here remains on genre primarily, and secondarily the films’ political treatment of their multiple characters, to which the theory of polyphony is most applicable.
Importantly, John Bruns has directly studied narrative polyphony in relation to network films. In his 2008 article “The Polyphonic Film”, Bruns traces the history of the analogy to musical polyphony in film studies, noting its pertinence to Eisenstein, Bazin, Bordwell and others (191-197). As Bruns describes it, polyphony is a term used in music and philosophy to describe a method of “speaking several languages at once” in counter to universalism. In narratives this approach resists “merging [the individual consciousness of characters]…with an authorial worldview” (190). Polyphony is thus a term which describes narrative pluralism wherein characters’ voices/threads remain individual and equally audible/visible. Bruns confirms this when he writes that the network film “Magnolia does not shift our attention away from a central character; it does not disrupt the narrative but…gives it the quality of an irreducible plurality” (203). Bruns concentrates on how network films’ plots treat the degrees of in/commensurability between characters. He describes Magnolia as a film which “preserves the independence of its individual elements” and is therefore “polyphonic” (190, original emphasis). In contrast, he argues that Babel and Crash do not achieve polyphony because their narrative strands converge to form unifying messages (189, 208). I agree with Bruns that Babel and Crash do not achieve polyphony because they subordinate their characters’ voices/threads to a monolithic authorial message, and I detail the reasons why in Chapters Three through Six. Addressing such factors helps to elucidate the films’ narrative politics, which is a point of analytical interest and depth I proceed to address alongside my main exploration of whether network films can be described as a genre.

Chapter Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have looked at whether the seven case studies share common topics so as to determine if they constitute a genre. Using Altman’s definition of genre, I have begun to explore two gaps in the literature on network films: the scarcity of discussion of these films in genre terms and the need for comparative film studies. In looking at the common topics and themes of pluralism, social cross sections, social problems, chance, and network community, it is evident that despite their local differences, these network films do broadly use common semantics and syntaxes. As Berg (2006) also discusses network films as “Polyphonic” (16), but does not explicitly draw on Bakhtin nor is his argument as detailed as Bruns’ (2008). Nevertheless, Berg similarly distinguishes non-polyphonic to “Polyphonic” films according to “whether or not the protagonists have a single, shared goal or separate ones” (16).
noted several times already, these conjunctions point to the possibility that network films constitute a genre.

Despite their different stories, structures, range of characters and social issues, the films consistently emphasise the ways in which connectivity restructures traditional social relationships. These films consider and question the success and/or likelihood of cosmopolitanism in multicultural societies. Relationships and/or encounters between strangers render characters from different class, gender and cultural backgrounds familiars in various ways. These relationships create specific meanings regarding the types of societies they represent and imagine. However, they persistently foreground modes of connection which form definitive semantic and syntactic markers.

At this early stage, the proposition that these films constitute a genre appears promising. However, further examination of their narrative politics, including their treatments of polyphony, their stylistics, and their use of time and space, is needed to test this hypothesis. This chapter has introduced the seven case studies and has explained the general topics and themes which are distinct to the films. The next chapter covers in detail the issues of character types, stereotyping, and the construction of power relationships between characters, signalled as potential generic markers in Chapter One, in order to further investigate whether network films can be called a genre.
Chapter Three: Character Types

As part of my inquiry into whether network films constitute a genre, this chapter examines whether there are semantic consistencies in the representation of characters in the seven case studies. In Chapters One and Two I established that the use of multiple characters who are strangers to one another and the resultant theme of network community distinguish network films from single and paired protagonist films as well as ensemble films. Rick Altman describes “common…characters”, or what I describe as character types, as a semantic factor of genres (1999, 219). Throughout this chapter I analyse whether the films portray characters in similar ways and whether they share character types. I concentrate on the films’ central, networked characters. Networked characters are those who are given significant narrative weight, are shown in various surroundings, and share multiple connections to other network characters. This is in contrast to secondary characters who only appear in connection to one other group of characters or specific character.

Network films are interesting because unlike other genres such as Westerns, romantic comedies, or horror films, they do not seem to consistently feature specific stock characters like the gun-toting cowboy, the couple who fall in, out and in love again, or the psychopathic killer. Network films’ characters are incredibly varied and are usually realistic and complex rather than stereotypical (Bordwell 2008a, 196-97). However, it has struck me that there are three broad categories of characters present in each of the seven films. These three categories are: cultural others; men in crisis; and “strong” women. At a preliminary glance it seems these three categories are dominant in each of the seven films, and most clearly hold claim to the possibility that they constitute character types. Within these categories characters in some films behave similarly. For instance, hegemonic characters often befriend cultural others while cultural others sometimes act in irresponsible ways. These similarities suggest that these are common, possibly generic character types. Throughout this chapter I examine the ways in which the films treat these characters in terms of stereotypes and relationships of power. Although network films aim to present complex social relationships, these similarities also recall Barry Keith Grant’s claim that “[i]n genre movies characters are more often recognisable types rather than psychologically complex characters” (2007, 17). Alternately, narrative politics greatly differentiate the films and bring contestation to the question of whether the films convey character types generically. Whatever the
outcome, in examining whether or not the seven films use comparable character types this chapter analyses the ideologies at play in the seven network films’ social cross sections.

**Social Cross Sections**

As Chapter One explained (34-8), a cross cultural analysis of network films’ depictions of characters and the narrative politics and ideologies relating to characterisation has not yet been undertaken on a broad scale. Bordwell (2008a) and Azcona (2010) have provided classifications of network films but their works do not closely investigate whether individual films succeed in presenting pluralistic messages. Work such as this has been undertaken by authors of articles and books such as Bruns’ article on polyphony in *Magnolia* (2008), Paul Kerr’s (2010) and Marina Hassapopoulou’s (2008) separate articles on *Babel*, and Hsuan L. Hsu’s (2006), Vorris L. Nunley’s (2007) and Susan and Henry Giroux’s (2007) various works on *Crash*. As shown in Chapter One, such works tend to focus on single films or compare a limited number of films. In view of this lack of cross cultural comparative in-depth analysis of narrative politics, this chapter explores the extents to which the films champion and/or compromise their representations of pluralism.

The seven case studies’ types of social cross sections exhibit commonalities which potentially form generic traits. As explained in Chapter Two, each adopts a social cross section that cuts across class, cultural and gender differences, as well as sexual and age differences in some films. This focus on characters from various majority and minority social standings in terms of class, racial and sexual identities offers the means of pluralistic approaches to representing societies. It is often noted that network films rely on well known actors and stereotypes in order to compensate for the fact that they “sacrifice depth of characterization to breadth of coverage” (Bordwell 2008a, 197). They also use particular types of characters and stars to convey particular communities or types of people. For instance, cultural others are often placed alongside dominant mainstream characters, so that problems of discrimination and inequalities are brought to attention. In many films stars’ racial and cultural backgrounds inform their characters’ identities. For example, in *Crash* the actors’/characters’ racial identities contribute a central part of the thematic content, and in *Lantana* actors’/characters’ racial and cultural identities denote a key thematic undercurrent relating to Australia’s
history of immigration and colonial relationships. Such practices of characterisation deserve close scrutiny as to whether the films stereotype characters according to their racial, cultural, and professional identities. Investigating this aspect of the films’ characterisations adds depth to this chapter’s overarching concentration on whether the films portray character types.

Stuart Hall (1997), drawing on Richard Dyer’s distinction between types and stereotypes, explains that types are categories with which we use to interpret the world. Dyer writes that types are “‘simple…characterization[s] in which a few traits are foregrounded and change or ‘development’ is kept to a minimum’” (1977 qtd. in Hall 257). Stereotyping, however, tends to “reduce everything about the person to [simple and recognisable] traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity” (Hall 1997, 258, original emphasis). Hall also writes that “stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power” (258, original emphasis). In response to this distinction between types and stereotypes, this chapter concurrently explores the structural as well as political use of characters in the seven films. The motif of social cross sections signals the films’ commitment to reimagining community as pluralistic and ever changing. However, it is important to assess whether the films stereotype their characters in order to see whether they successfully convey cultural pluralism in their narrative politics and/or whether they perpetuate hegemonic ideologies. Since characters in network films occupy limited screen time they often represent stereotypes and/or archetypes, while subtleties and contradictions of characterisation are sometimes forgone. In some films there are central characters or characters who have more connections than others, and the use of stars can also mean that particular characters dominate the film. These cases may reinstate hegemonic narrative traditions. Screen time and casting can weight films and characters so that despite their thematic attentions to pluralism the films may focus on particular characters while marginalising others. This chapter analyses the case studies’ presentations of such aspects so as to evaluate the extents to which the films offer generic markers in the semantic and syntactic production of narrative politics.

Representing Pluralism

While network films feature multiple characters, they range from having few to many characters. For instance, Love concentrates on three women whereas Crash has
sixteen network characters. The minimum number of network characters necessary to
define a film as a network film is three characters. This is because two characters would
not construct a broad social scope but instead an interrelationship between a pair which
suggests a closed circuit rather than an open network. Some films consider broader
class and cultural differences than others, as for example Code Unknown ranges from
the near-destitute to the wealthy in comparison to Lantana’s portrait of working to
upper middle class characters. Despite the varying number of characters and different
class ranges in their cross sections, the seven films present their network characters in
similar ways. Characters of different classes, cultural backgrounds and genders are
shown in individual threads so that their perspectives are centralised rather than
peripheral. This is in contrast to single protagonist films which only afford narrative
centrality to one or two characters, and in contrast to ensemble films in which characters
share close, familiar bonds rather than being more separately individuated. Networked
characters therefore provide a key semantic element.

An important factor of the characters in the seven network films is that the
central characters’ professions tend to bring them into contact with others. Such
professions facilitate the cosmopolitan theme of responsibility for others. Characters in
the selected films consist of lawyers (Crash: Rick; Lantana: John), academics (Lantana:
John; Edge: Nejat), journalists (Code Unknown: Georges; Mumbai: Rupali), actors,
performers, and directors (Code Unknown: Anne, Amadou; Love: Ming; Crash:
Cameron), shop owners and vendors (Crash: Farhad; Edge: Nejat; Mumbai: Thomas),
farmers (Code Unknown: Georges’ father), doctors and counsellors (Love: Salma;
Lantana: Valerie; Crash: Dorri), police (Lantana: Leon; Crash: Grahame, John and
Tom) students and/or young rebels (Edge: Lotte and Ayten; Crash: Anthony and Peter),
prostitutes (Edge: Yeter), maids and nannies (Babel: Amelia; Crash: Maria), and taxi
drivers (Code Unknown: Amadou’s father).

Characters are typically brought together in their professional capacities, which
occasionally lead to personal rather than professional links and changes being made.
This is evident in each of the seven case studies. In Edge Ali and Yeter’s relationship
originates from her profession as a prostitute, but when she moves in with Ali she and

14 Such films exist, for instance Chungking Express (Kar-Wai, 1994) and The Double Life of Véronique
(Kieslowski, 1991). Bordwell has noted these type of films’ closeness to network films, but has also
rejected the possibility that they are network films (2008, 197, 214-218).
Nejat develop a friendship that after her death sees Nejat travel to Istanbul to search for her family. In *Lantana* Leon’s job as a police officer steers him towards John, whose confessions about his marriage reflect and in turn affect Leon’s own marriage. Similarly, the police officer Patil in *Mumbai* prompts Suresh to change his xenophobic behaviour. Police officer John Ryan in *Crash* surprises Christine when he rescues her from a burning car rather than assaulting her again. *Love* shows the three women helping one another in small ways at their place of work. At the clinic Salma helps Siti and Dwi escape the hold of their husband by giving them contraception. And Ming avoids embarrassing Salma when she tactfully declines from pointing out that Salma’s husband is at the restaurant with his second wife. In *Babel* Amelia’s duty of care to Richard and Susan’s children becomes a matter of life and death. And *Code Unknown* gathers together three of its network characters in relation to the Romanian woman Maria’s occupation of begging on the street. This scene prompts viewers to question whether people have cosmopolitan responsibility for others who are destitute. Characters’ occupations and the resulting cosmopolitan relationships and confrontations they experience are key tropes in each of the seven films. This strongly suggests that characters whose occupations involve cosmopolitan relationships are a resounding character type in network films.

**Cultural Others**

![Figure 3.1 (Code Unknown)](image)
In each of the seven case studies cultural others occupy central narrative positions which suggests that cultural others may constitute a generic character type. *Love* shows a Chinese Indonesian woman in Indonesia. *Edge* portrays minority figures of Turks and Turkish German people in Germany. *Lantana* presents numerous non-Anglo characters and only one Aboriginal character, thereby referring to the controversial question of what might constitute Australian identity. *Babel* features Mexican and Moroccan characters as others in direct relation to the politically powerful and perceptually hegemonic American characters while in Japan Chieko is identified a cultural other because she is deaf. In conjunction with white Americans, *Crash* surveys a panoply of non-white Americans. *Mumbai* shows a poverty-stricken slum dweller as well as hegemonic wealthy characters. And *Code Unknown* features non-white and non-Western European characters alongside its white, Western Europeans. Since cultural others are frequently foregrounded in network films, it should be asked whether these characters constitute character types. This topic also entails the question of whether network films successfully convey cultural pluralism.

The seven films frequently cite cultural types and stereotypes but alter and subvert them as they humanise the characters. Grant notes that “Ethnic characters are often flat stereotypes in genre movies” (2007, 17). In contrast, the seven case studies tend to give psychological depth to such characters. Complementing their subversion of stereotypes of cultural others, many of these films show hegemonic characters who, although initially hostile to cultural others, share encounters which transform their racist and/or hostile attitudes. If they do form generic character types then it might be said that network films are unlike many other genre films in their depictions of cultural others because these types of characters are given more depth and respect than in other films. Yet the fact that non-white characters are marginalised and ethnic stereotypes are present in other examples of network films such as *He’s Just Not That Into You* (minor black female characters), *Paris* (an unbelievably idealistic French African character [Klapisch 2008]) and *Valentine’s Day* (a minor, comedic role for an Asian character) suggests that network films fall into similar traps as other genre films. This section examines how each of the seven case study films aim to subvert stereotypes of cultural others.

Conversely, the fact that these characters draw from or associate with longstanding stereotypes raises the question of whether creating sympathy for these
characters merely perpetuates rather than dispenses with such stereotypes. While such treatment is meant to subvert stereotypes, many films end up reinstating them. Despite their intentions to the contrary, stereotyping is practised in many instances of the seven films. This is to varying degrees, from playful recitations and modernisations, to one-dimensional portraits, to unsuccessful or superficial attempts to subvert and/or explain the stereotypes.

*Edge* plays strongly on the notion of the irrational Turkish other (in relation to Germans) in order to subvert this stereotype. When Ali strikes Yeter this action recalls a stereotype of patriarchal Turkish domestic violence seen elsewhere in *40 m² Deutschland* (Baser 1986) and *Farewell to a False Paradise* (Baser 1989) (see Göktürk 2002). In *Edge* this stereotype is undercut by the fact that Yeter’s death is accidental, as she happens to fall and hit her head on the bed post. This accidental moment and Ali’s shock at the results undermines the stereotypical intention to do violence. Similarly, when the street urchins in Istanbul shoot Lotte this recalls stereotypes of violent Turkish boys. Yet it is debatable whether *Edge* perpetuates cultural stereotypes. It could be argued that showing Ali and the boys’ actions to be unthinking and spontaneous, the film merely swaps the stereotype of sinister cultural others for irresponsible ones. On a related note Thomas Elsaesser (2008) claims that *Edge* fatally “punishe[s]” its transgressive female characters Lotte and Yeter for their respective forays into lesbianism, political activism, and prostitution (37). However, I contend that the narrative poignancy of Lotte’s and Yeter’s deaths more importantly emphasises the stakes of Turkey’s need to redress its history of violence and political unrest rather than punishing their behaviour. Moreover, the fact that Ali did not mean to kill Yeter and the boys did not expect to kill Lotte emphasises contingency rather than innate stereotypical qualities. The fact that the boys run away rather than gloat and the fact that Ali turns himself in shows these characters not as stereotypically violent, but as people who are aware of the consequences of their spontaneous actions and, in Ali’s case, acts responsibly. Therein, *Edge* refuses to simply stereotype its cultural others and depicts these characters as complex.

*Lantana* presents a wide variety of cultural others, and indeed questions whether Australian society is entirely populated by people who are cultural others to one another. This suggests that cultural others are a prevalent character type amongst network films. *Lantana* does not explicitly address the otherness of its non-Anglo
characters, which is significant in Australian cinema. As Felicity Collins and Therese Davis (2004) note of the contemporaneous Australian film Walking On Water (Ayres 2002), Lantana similarly “treats this difference as unremarkable” (50). By inscribing multicultural characters’ differences to white characters as unremarkable, and in featuring a large number of multicultural characters, Lantana is part of a shift in [Australian] identity politics from ethnic diasporas maintaining their language and connections to their homelands, to an oppositional multicultural and Indigenous aesthetic aimed at unanchoring the core Anglo-Celtic imaginary. (50).

In presenting a mix of actors with unmentioned but recognisably various cultural backgrounds, Lantana subtly challenges the legitimacy of Australia’s “core Anglo-Celtic imaginary” (50). For instance, its depiction of the Aboriginal woman Claudia makes no stereotypically overt aural or verbal reference to her otherness. No mention is made of the fact that she is Aboriginal, suggesting that she is an “ordinary” Indigenous presence amongst the Anglo population. Yet the fact that she works as a police officer connotes Australia’s long and controversial history of aggrieved relationships between white and Aboriginal people. Kirsty Duncanson (2009) argues that Claudia represents “a quiet suggestion of a more legitimate legal authority” than the Anglo characters Leon’s or John’s failed attempts to find a criminal or legal order to enforce (34). The fact Claudia apparently faces no racial discrimination in the film implies that she is accepted within Australian society, in contrast to stereotypes of hostility between white and indigenous Australians.

Despite Claudia’s symbolic job as a police officer and the unremarked nature of her identity, however, her peripheral narrative position is troubling. We are shown little insight into her life beyond Leon’s company. Leon, a much more central character with considerably more screen time than Claudia, oversees her romantic life since he asks her about it and gives her advice. Claudia’s marked presence functions symbolically and thereby abstractly, and is based on the margins of the narrative. Lantana thus purportedly presents cultural “others” as constitutive of its social cross section, supporting the argument that, as does Edge, network films present cultural others as recurring character types. However, Lantana’s narrative politics in its representation of these characters deserves critical attention.
Similarly, *Lantana*’s portrait of the Greek Australian Nik aims to undercut the stereotype of the irrational and “distrustful” immigrant (Rayner 2000, 12-13). The film represents Nik as an alcoholic, unemployed immigrant, qualities associated with immigrants who struggle to adapt to the Australian society and landscape in films such as *Romulus, My Father* (Roxburgh 2007), *The Harp in the South* (Whaley 1987), and *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (Flanagan 1998). The suggestion that Nik has murdered and possibly raped Valerie in the wilderness also recalls Ivan Milat’s rural backpacker murders during the 1990s. However, in revealing Nik’s innocence the film steers viewers to feel ashamed for assuming his guilt. Nik’s blamelessness undercuts the distrustful immigrant stereotype and prompts viewers to reassess their assumptions and prejudices surrounding such a character.

However, in other ways *Lantana* frames Nik and his wife Paula respectively as irresponsible and irrational others. Nik irresponsibly drives while drunk. His decision to take a shortcut without explaining himself prompts Valerie to jump out of the car and subsequently fall to her death. And the scene which shows him crying in his wife Paula’s arms is a conventionally emasculating portrait. The film thus depicts him as an irresponsible other and emasculates his position as an unemployed stay at home father since his wife treats him like a child (Wood 2007, 148). Paula’s rage at Jane for having tidied her house during her absence also betrays an element of irrationality. It is not made clear whether Paula knows Jane suspected Nik, and Jane’s suspicions in fact lead to the resolution of Valerie’s disappearance. Paula’s anger at Jane therefore seems an overreaction. One of the final scenes shows Nik and Paula happily resting on their lawn with their children, idealising them as the harmonious, trusting family (Figure 3.2). Yet the camera frames them from a distance, objectifying them as the poor yet happy and innocent immigrant family. Thereby *Lantana* further perpetuates othering perspectives of marginalised people.

It is evident that, similar to *Edge*, *Lantana* also presents

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15 By the term “emasculating” I imply that Nik is made to seem disempowered. Wood (2007) confirms this when she writes “Nik’s gestures, stance and facial expressions show him to be more like a boy…than a maturing male” and that “[t]he reduction of men to boys by women’s ability to assume responsibility and stake out their sexual expectations is not an attractive prospect” for these characters (148).

16 A similar reversal of suspicions occurs in relation to the threatening gay man Patrick. After we are led to suspect Patrick possibly murdered Valerie, he is shown to be a victim of personal alienation when we see him standing forlorn and lonely in the rain watching his married lover from afar. This revelation drives the audience to pity Patrick rather than fear him. However, much like Claudia, *Lantana* treats Patrick as a peripheral character, and in prompting audiences to pity rather than respect this character, the film adopts a problematically condescending viewpoint.
cultural others as key figures in its social cross section. This importance of cultural others to both films suggest that the cultural other may be a character type.

![Figure 3.2](image)

*Crash* also prominently features cultural others – in this case non-white characters – in its social cross section. It too shows these characters as having reasons for their irrational behaviour. Christine is understandably upset and angry after she is molested. Shaniqua grows increasingly indignant as John proceeds to insult and racially vilify her, just as Ria is furious when Graham misidentifies her background as Mexican rather than her mix of El Salvadorian and Puerto Rican ancestry. Farhad embodies an irrational, paranoid Middle Eastern man, but sympathy is encouraged for his loss when his store is vandalised. Anthony and Peter’s decision to hijack Rick and Jean’s car is preceded by Anthony’s astute perception that Jean avoids them because of prejudicial fear. *Crash* tries to portray cultural others as people in desperate circumstances and/or provoked anger, in order to explain these characters’ behaviour.

Nevertheless, *Crash* reinstates stereotypes of cultural others as irrational, passive, and/or dangerous. When Anthony and Peter decide to mug Jean and Rick, as Giroux and Giroux note, this enacts a “cheap reversal” of Anthony’s criticism of white privilege and the “trigger happy” LAPD by turning him and the up-till-then conciliatory Peter into gun-toting thieves (2007, 750). *Crash* thereby reinstates the stereotype of dangerous young black men and legitimises the LAPD’s authority and Jean’s prejudicial fear. Likewise Shaniqua shifts from justified indignation at John’s insults to a
demeanour of haughty “bitchiness” when she refuses John’s father help.\textsuperscript{17} Later her ignorance is supposed to be comic when she yells at another man “don’t talk to me unless you speak American!” Ria also appears as little other than a stereotypically hot headed Latino woman. Similarly, despite the film’s insistence that Farhad (Tony Shoub) is not Arab (therefore rendering him a ‘safe’ middle eastern American citizen), he is portrayed as a loose cannon whose irrational paranoia leads him to an attempted act of terrorism. And Catherine Prendergast (2007, 347) notes that Asian characters in \textit{Crash}, while receiving marginally more screen time than in typical mainstream films, are nevertheless included for the most part as comic relief rather than fleshed-out characters. Through its narrative politics \textit{Crash} reinstates the stereotypes and/or racial discrimination it purports to challenge and reject.\textsuperscript{18} Returning to the question of whether network films are a genre, the prominence of cultural others in the films so far discussed indicates that they may form a character type.

\textit{Code Unknown} presents its cultural others as sympathetic and/or legitimately angered, and shows that network films often represent cultural others as complex. For instance, in one scene Amadou’s mother rejects the counsellor’s pronouncement of the existence of a legendary African “homeland”, telling him that there is no such thing. This scene ironically undermines the stereotypical association of French African immigrants with vague notions of ancestral homelands. This represents an important challenge to Western characterisations of African and Eastern exotic, ancestrally cognisant others (Hall “When” 161).

At other times, however, \textit{Code Unknown} reinstates cultural stereotypes and hierarchical racial codes despite its complexity. Its portrait of the angry young African man Amadou and the Algerian bully on the metro complicate xenophobic stereotypes of “dangerous” and “angry Arab” others respectively. Such stereotypes and/or the topic of racism surrounding France’s ethnic minorities are found in films such as \textit{La Haine} (Massovitz 1995) and \textit{Bye, Bye} (Dridi 1995). At \textit{Code Unknown}’s outset Amadou’s defence of Maria appears noble and the resulting violence between him and Jean is provoked rather than unjustified or extreme (Lykidis 2009, 42; Figure 3.1). When white police officers unfairly arrest Amadou we are meant to understand that racism against

\textsuperscript{17} Yarbrough and Bennett describe such a trait of “bitchiness” as a common stereotype of black women, labelled as the “Sapphire” stereotype (1999-2000, 638).

\textsuperscript{18} This is a topic to which much attention has been devoted, and for further detailed reading see Giroux and Giroux (2007), Hsu (2006), and Nunley (2007).
French Africans on the part of white, Western Europeans, is systemic in France. Yet, later Amadou’s anger is depicted as irrational. At a restaurant, Amadou tells his white girlfriend a story about his father’s immigration to France and the racist treatment he faced. When a white waiter seats the couple in a different place from where Amadou booked, it is clear from Amadou’s distraction from the conversation and his tense body language that he presumes the waiter is being discriminatory towards him. However, here Amadou’s presumption is undermined as it is his own fault he and his girlfriend ran late and lost their preferred seat. Although he concedes to the waiter’s explanation, Amadou comments disparagingly on his girlfriend’s watch, implying that in having confirmed the waiter’s explanation by pointing out the time on her watch, his girlfriend is complicit in a racist system. When she removes her watch to prove her loyalty to him, Amadou is satisfied. However, soon she unconsciously strokes her bare wrist and, on passing, the waiter returns the discarded watch. Although she refuses it, these reminders suggest an ongoing undercurrent of Amadou’s paranoia. In doing so, Code Unknown complicates its earlier suggestion of systemic racism in France at the expense of rendering Amadou’s behaviour irrational.

Code Unknown’s later scene on the train in which two Arab men alternately harass and defend Anne also presents complex and arguably problematic narrative politics. When the young Arab man bullies Anne, he is countered by an older Arab man who defends her. This scene intimates multiple aspects of the social conflicts between white and Arab people in France. It arguably implies that the young man’s hostility towards Anne partially stems from resentment of the French colonisation and violence towards Algeria.19 Anne’s silence and obvious wish to avoid confrontation echoes on an everyday level the French government’s reticence to address the matter (Migdalovitz 2010, 11; Figure 3.3).

19 This argument is strengthened by considering the central theme of French Algerian relationships in Haneke’s later film Hidden (2005) (see Wheatley 2009, 155-184). Furthermore, the same two actors (Maurice Bénichou and Walid Afkir) play the roles of the Arab men in Code Unknown and the Algerian father and son in Hidden.
The older man’s defence is a kind gesture and one which at first glance signals a positive French Algerian relation. Yet, as Roy Grundmann (2010) discusses, his actions “encourages the viewers to take sides against the young Arab man and to identify with Anne’s hegemonic position” (fn.52). This problematises the legitimacy of the young man’s anger, regressing from a complication of the stereotype of the “angry Arab”. Thus again, Code Unknown arguably undermines its own attempts to challenge negative cultural stereotypes. Network films’ narrative politics evidently require close examination for the ways in which they depict cultural others, even in cases which show complex relationships between cultural others and hegemonic society. As in Edge, Lantana, and Crash, Code Unknown also features cultural others prominently, supporting the claim that these figures are character types in network films.

Akin to Edge, Lantana, and Code Unknown, Babel presents cultural others as crucial to its social cross section. It aims to give depth to characters who are cultural others in relation to Americans and/or members of local hegemonies. It attempts to subvert the stereotype of the sexualised Japanese schoolgirl by showing her sexual behaviour to be an act of defiance and vulnerability in relation to her marginalisation because of her deafness (Hassapopoulou 2008). And it challenges xenophobia against illegal Mexican immigrants in America and Muslim people who live in the desert (in a

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20 Tellingly, on Babel’s DVD featurette Iñárritu states “Deaf girls have a great sexual energy, I don’t know why. They think about it all the time.” The acting coach adds “I wouldn’t say deaf equals erotic, but [Chieko] can easily be seen that way” (“Common Ground” 2006). These points of view intersect with both the practice of eroticising school girls in Japanese visual culture and the Orientalist stereotype of quiet young Asian women.
thinly veiled analogy to the imagery of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars) by showing their circumstances to be desperate and life-threatening. Pisters (2008) argues that *Babel* presents a politic of “becoming minoritarian”, as the characters from the first world are placed in situations that other them, and the “others” to Western hegemony are portrayed with equal importance to the Hollywood stars. Patricia Pisters claims that the viewer is thereby asked to become minoritarian by empathising with the characters in minoritarian positions.

Nevertheless, *Babel* reinstates stereotypes about cultural “others”. These include incestuous and primitive Moroccan boys, impulsive and unreasonable Mexicans, and sensuous, victimised Japanese women. *Babel* characterises the Moroccan boys Yussef and Ahmed as foolish and naïve. Yussef and his sister harbour an incestuous attraction to each other, perpetuating stereotypes of third-world children as uncivilised and ignorant of social taboos. The fact that Iñárritu employed unprofessional actors for these latter roles perpetuates essentialist perspectives that the actors are playing their true selves. *Babel* thus creates a condescending portrait of poverty stricken, ill educated North African villagers. Similarly, Amelia’s nephew Santiago behaves in ways that actualise the terms of his early joking description of Mexicans as dangerous. Recalling Nik in *Lantana* he drives while drunk, unwisely provokes the border guard and drives recklessly into the desert. His rash actions lead to Amelia and the children’s near deaths and Amelia’s deportation. Regarding both these depictions, Paul Kerr (2010) succinctly notes that “whilst the multi-character, multilingual structure appears to present an equitable image of a dislocated world it is only, in fact, the Mexican and Moroccan characters who are shown to use weapons irresponsibly” (42). Santiago and the Moroccan boys fire guns in moments of exuberance and competition, irresponsibly frightening and harming those around them. Moreover, because we discover near the film’s conclusion that Amelia decided to take the American children across the Mexican border knowing that their mother had been shot prompts viewers to see Amelia’s erstwhile sympathetically portrayed decision as foolish in retrospect. And *Babel*’s portrait of Chieko situates the female, othered body as a site of suffering and hysteria in need of the restoration of patriarchal order (Hassapopoulou 2008). *Babel* presents cultural “others” as significant, sympathetic characters, similar to the films discussed above, adding weight to the claim that network films contain specific character types. At the same time, alongside those films, *Babel* presents these character types problematically within its social cross section.
Love also presents cultural others as endearing and admirable central figures in its social cross section. Its representation of Ming seeks to counter the characterisation of Chinese Indonesians as materialistically greedy, a stereotype common in Indonesian cinema during the twentieth century (Heryanto 2004, 36; Tan 1991, 123). Ming is shown to move past her materialistic desires when she decides to pursue acting classes without Koh Abun’s approval. Ultimately her move to a poor neighbourhood and her decision to not rely on men for financial support signals her respect for non-materialistic pursuits. However, we are encouraged to laugh at her contradictory and cheeky decision at the end of the film to take lovers in order to climb the social ladder, in spite of her simultaneous decision to not depend on men any longer. This hypocritical moment detrimentally re-establishes the stereotype of the materialistic Chinese Indonesian. It undermines Ming’s newfound discovery of independence and suggests that she will hypocritically return to her recently denounced materialistic values.

Similarly, Love’s representation of a Yogyakartan villager Siti arguably un成功fully seeks to subvert the stereotype of Javanese people as “soft, gentle and calm” (Falah 2009, 18). While at first Siti fits this description, her lesbian relationship and decision to escape the polygamous marriage casts her as proactive and transgressive. On the one hand, Love conveys a feminist message of liberation as well as revolutionarily portraying homosexuality in a positive light. On the other hand, the fact that this lesbian role falls to the Javanese villager, and the fact that her lover Dwi is associated with typical motifs of masculinity and femme fatales (such as smoking and unkempt hair [Heider 61]) arguably perpetuates negative imagery surrounding Javanese and lesbians in Indonesia (Kurnia 2009, par.16), despite the film’s contrary overt intentions. Thereby in its representation of the cultural others Love adds to the conviction that network films present cultural others as generic character types, although not without political shortcomings.

Mumbai is another example which presents a cultural other, the slum dweller Thomas, as a central character to be pitied. Thomas is helpless to change his living conditions, as the film comments on the widespread poverty in India. However, Thomas’ peripheral position in Mumbai’s narrative serves to maintain a tokenistic
approach to representing cultural others, similar to that of Claudia in *Lantana*. His character arc encourages viewers to see him as a character whose agency is wayward and naïve. His decision to call in bomb threats to shopping malls gives him a sense of power for a time, but when he sees an old man rushed to hospital because of the shock during his evacuation from a mall, Thomas realises the error of his ways. In his final scenes Thomas apologetically gives a flower to the old man, and when Patil’s protégé Kadam halts him during the two minutes silence he is emotionally overcome by the mood of the people gathered (Figure 3.4). This narrative arc sees Thomas rebel and then repent for it, turning him from a victim into an irresponsible other, undermining the potency of the critique of India’s systemic economic inequality.

Additionally, the figure of the Muslim man whom Suresh persecutes recalls the importance of the Arab and Muslim cultural others in *Edge, Code Unknown, Crash,* and *Babel.* Yet in *Mumbai* this character only occupies the film’s margins, as a foil for Suresh’s xenophobia. In befriending the Muslim man, Suresh earns moral capital, legitimating his hegemonic narrative centrality. Thus, *Mumbai* features the possibly generic character type of cultural others, but presents them in ways that undermine its initial narrative complexity and social critique.

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Or other Indian films such as *All the Best: Fun Begins* (Shetty 2009), which presents people who live in poverty as comedic figures. Nevertheless there are numerous other Indian films which principally and seriously treat the topic of poverty. See *Dharavi* (Mishra 1991), *Parinda* (Chopra 1989), and *Salaam Bombay!* (Nair 1988).
These seven films evidently present cultural others as sympathetic and important to their social cross sections, aiming to create complex portraits of societies. This indicates that perhaps the sympathetic cultural other is a character type and generic marker of network films. Looking closely at the ways in which they represent cultural others, the extents to which the films convey polyphonic portraits of social cross sections vary. Each of the films convey cultural others with some degree of narrative problems. *Babel, Crash, Mumbai* clearly contain narrative hierarchies which privilege hegemonic characters and denigrate and/or marginalise cultural others. *Edge, Lantana, Code Unknown* and *Love* can also be accused of this problem, although in these instances the accusations are more contestable. Despite being about social plurality, network films often favour certain figures, marginalise others, and in some cases, perpetuate stereotypes. Many of them act in foolish ways, but this is not a common enough trait to be identifiable as a recurring generic quality. Politics aside, the importance of cultural others in each of the seven films as members of a social cross section indicates that such figures can be considered generic character types.

**Men in Crisis**

![Figure 3.5 (Leon in Lantana)](image)

![Figure 3.6 (Richard in Babel)](image)

Complementing the representations of cultural others as people who suffer, the seven films also represent hegemonic male characters as people who suffer. Even in the female-centred *Love*, the two most likeable male characters Nadim (Salma’s son) and Firman (Ming’s friend) experience crises in relationships. Many of the seven network films feature male characters whose marriages are in crisis at the outsets, which suggests that this may represent a character type. Most common is that of the embattled divorcé, widower or husband whose marriage is in crisis at the outset of the films. This type of character is present in *Babel, Lantana, Crash, Code Unknown, Edge* and *Mumbai*. Richard and Yasujiro in *Babel* respectively mourn the death of a child and
wife, and Richard’s marriage is rocky. *Crash* sees Cameron endure his wife’s anger after he is unable to stop John molesting her, and Rick is subject to Jean’s rage after they are carjacked. *Lantana*’s male characters all experience relationship difficulties, most notably Leon, who seeks an affair because he feels “numb”, and John, whose grief, previous infidelity, and criticism of Valerie’s way of grieving about the death of their daughter puts his and Valerie’s marriage on shaky ground. Pete and Nik also appear emasculated, Jane having rejected Pete, and Nik being an unemployed stay at home father, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Patrick struggles with the disappointment that his lover is not willing to leave his wife for him. And in *Code Unknown* Georges occupies uncertain ground as Anne’s lover, as she alternately embraces and rejects him during the film. Although each of these network characters inhabits different cultural contexts and classes, they are presented similarly as victims of turbulent marital and familial relationships.

In the seven films male characters whose romantic relationships are not foregrounded tend to experience disillusionment with their economic, familial, and ideological circumstances. While *Mumbai* portrays but does not foreground its male network characters’ domestic lives, they are helpless to feelings of despair. Nikhil experiences post traumatic stress, Kadam and Patil become disillusioned with the police force’s corruption, Thomas is humiliated in a department store and is forced to leave with his wife and daughter, and Suresh detests his unemployment. Similar to *Mumbai*’s Kadam and Patil, *Crash* shows police officers Tom and Detective Graham become disillusioned by the police force and legal system’s corruption. *Edge* ventures away from critiques of legal institutions. Ali’s relationship with Yeter is turbulent because of his alcoholism. And Nejat’s anger towards Ali after Ali kills Yeter shows his disillusionment with him. These characters all experience traumas and relationship difficulties. The thematic motif of men in crisis can therefore be described as a character type, with wide parameters.

Interestingly, although the films privilege multiple characters and feature men in crisis, it is sometimes the case that males dominate in terms of network connections, narrative focus, screen time, amount of characters and in terms of general textual politics. The amount of connections one network character has to others weights that character as more central to those who are only connected with one or few others. In most of the films the men in crisis seek to regain their senses of masculinity and power.
In *Babel*, *Mumbai*, *Lantana*, and *Crash* key male characters have their sense of masculinity restored, while other men remain suffering. Grahame has the most connections in *Crash*, as do Leon in *Lantana*, and Nejat in *Edge*. The latter two also have the most screen time, so that they dominate quantitatively both in connections and screen time. In *Crash* the characters Grahame and John both have screen time of around nineteen minutes.\(^2\) It is striking that these centrally connected and screen-time-dominating roles are male figures. This suggests that these films follow traditional narrative structures that privilege heroes and hegemonic patriarchal agency rather than polyphony (see Chapter Two 70-72). Similarly, *Mumbai*’s cast is predominantly male. *Babel*, *Code Unknown* and *Love* are exceptions with more female characters, although the narrative power given to male characters in some cases overshadows that of female roles. In the seven films heroes and secondary characters arise, as some characters are privileged over others. As this section analyses, many of the films restore patriarchal order, illustrating conservative narrative politics.

Although *Babel*’s cast features more central female than male characters, its hegemonic male in crisis, Richard, is conveyed in a more powerful and active role than the female characters and cultural others. For example, it is only when Richard becomes the active and heroic husband and Susan is victimised, weakened and dependent on him to help her urinate that they reconnect. Tellingly, despite his deliberately aged and “unglamorous” appearance, Brad Pitt is filmed in ways that underscore his stardom and locate him as the central character. As Marina Hassapopoulou describes (2008), “the camera still lingers on his face on numerous occasions, reminding us of his internationally recognizable face”. Richard and Susan’s experiences affect all of the other narrative threads, and it is only through Richard and Susan that Amelia and Yussef’s threads are linked. Yussef’s thread only minimally registers in Chieko’s thread in a news report to which she pays little attention. Similarly, the Japanese policeman pays little attention to a news bulletin reporting Richard and Susan’s “happy ending” and prospective return to America. The policeman’s apathy towards this latter report highlights the disjunction between the Americans’ “happy ending” and the unhappy endings of the other threads. Yet as Hassapopoulou observes (2008), the fact that the Japanese report is subtitled draws the audience’s attention (if not the policeman’s) to

\(^2\) Grahame, Anthony, John and Cameron have the most screen time at around seventeen to twenty minutes, with Farhad, Peter and Christine present for around fourteen minutes each, and Rick, Jean, Daniel, Shaniqua, Dorri, Kim Lee and Ken Ho appearing for less than ten minutes each.
Richard and Susan’s thread once more. This reminds viewers of the connectedness of each of the threads and reiterates Richard and Susan’s thread as the lynchpin connecting the other threads. *Babel* therefore non-polyphonically places the American characters and in particular the proactive American male at the heart of its narrative. Richard is the only central male network character to actively overcome his crisis. 23 *Babel’s* hegemonic man in crisis thus may signify a generic figure.

Similar to *Babel*, *Mumbai* features men in crisis but politically weights them differently. Tellingly, Suresh’s and Nikhil’s stories have the most screen time with both appearing in twenty one scenes, whereas Thomas only appears in ten scenes, Patil in thirteen and the female reporter Rupali in sixteen. The final scenes frame Nikhil’s overwhelmed expression in close up when he realises that the city is honouring the victims of the train bombings. This shot of the typically heroic star R. Madhavan encapsulates a sense of patriotic pride and respect, verifying and paying respect to Nikhil’s experiences of trauma (Figure 3.7). *Mumbai* therefore inscribes him as a special member of society rather than a traumatised outcast as he had previously been characterised. In contrast, rather than having their inner conflicts polyphonically justified, the other male characters repent for their anti-social and non-patriotic behaviour. The policeman Patil delivers a speech at the end of the film expressing his regret that they have not yet caught the bombers and his desire to be reborn as someone with integrity. Suresh has a conversation with the Muslim man during which he realises the error of his xenophobia, and the slum dweller Thomas regrets and feels guilty for his bomb threats. These characters thereby cathartically repent their faults, whereas only Nikhil has his crisis validated and honoured. *Mumbai* thus presents the possible character type of men in crisis, while non-polyphonically privileging one particular heroic figure.

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23 To some extent Yasujiro’s embrace with Chieko signals a balm to his crisis, but he is not a central network character.
Lantana also prominently features the likely character type of men in crisis, although with arguably non-polyphonic narrative politics. The final appearances of John, Pete and Patrick show them grieving for the loss of their relationships. They are symbolically emasculated in losing their partners, particularly Patrick and Pete, sensitive men who have expressed their vulnerability throughout the film. John’s final scene looking out over the Australian bush recuperates his masculinity however. Although he grieves he knows and accepts his faults, and in this close up his facial expression is stoic in spite of his grief. He thereby emblems the popular ethos “big boys don’t cry”. As noted earlier, Nik’s last appearance shows him relaxing on his lawn with his wife and children, although camera positions emphasise his cultural otherness.

In contrast, Leon has the most screen time of all the characters and his thread provides the film’s narrative core. Although it is evident that Leon and Sonya’s marriage depends on their mutual happiness, the narrative focus on Leon as a central character represents a clear narrative hierarchy which problematises its approach to pluralistic storytelling. In the final scene Leon successfully and tenderly dances with Sonya to the salsa music of their Latin dance class (Figure 3.8). In the class Leon had been emasculated when, dancing incorrectly, the attractive dance instructor took Sonya to demonstrate the dance, saying it is one of passion and sexuality. Here, however, Leon dances with Sonya, showing a potential to regain his position as patriarch.
Notably, as Catherine Wood (2007) describes, “in this particular dance the leader and the follower change places at regular intervals, a changeover that requires some skill to achieve smoothly” (149). Wood’s argument is that Sonya and Leon find an equal and mutual basis on which to heal their relationship. Wood’s reading insightfully emphasises the film’s critique of patriarchal ideology and its message of the need for mutuality in relationships. Nevertheless, Sonya’s willingness to give Leon another chance rests on values which objectify her appearance and sexuality, emphasise her vulnerability and legitimise Leon’s authority. Throughout the film attention is drawn to Sonya’s precarious position as a middle aged woman. In briefly broaching (but not consummating) a sexual encounter with a younger man Sonya experiences a key patriarchal power play. Upon her change of mind the young man insults her and she is forced to walk away through the neon-lit and threatening car park without one of her shoes (a dishevelled Cinderella). This scene reiterates Sonya’s confession to Valerie that she is scared of leaving her marriage and facing the world “out there” being middle aged. The fact Sonya changes her mind about the affair with the young man further signals her submission to Leon’s chastisement that the man is too young for her. Moreover, when talking to Valerie Sonya expresses her desire for Leon to notice the changes in her face and reinject passion into their relationship, indicating that Leon has lost sexual interest in her. In acceding to Leon’s plea that they remain together, Sonya once more, albeit tentatively, legitimates Leon’s dominance and her own identification as a sexual object. *Lantana* therefore strongly expresses patriarchal perspectives. In depicting the potential character type of men in crisis, *Lantana*, as do *Babel* and *Mumbai*, presents narrative biases which detract from narrative polyphony.
In the case of *Crash* the men in crisis fall into a problematic racial hierarchy that privileges white male characters over both white and non-white female characters. Out of this emerges John Ryan as the most heroic. Although John appears initially as a stereotypically bigoted policeman he is subsequently portrayed as a victim when he is shown to devotedly help his sick father. The scene in which he saves Christine showcases his act as heroic and is meant to redeem his previous behaviour and present a progressive message of interracial kindness (Nunley 2007, 343; Giroux and Giroux 2007, 752). Hsu (2006) argues that this scene and the publicity image below (Figure 3.9) underscore *Crash’s* problematic politics (132-3).

![Figure 3.9](image)

John’s redemption through saving Christine is problematic because it “ignores that Ryan’s ability to fondle or at his whim save an African American woman is precisely what institutional and personal white and male privilege is about” (Nunley 2007, 344). This scene legitimates a white male hero as a person who holds unconditional power over “[d]e-voiced”, marginalised people (344). John is redeemed even though he does not verbally apologise to Christine for molesting her, nor does he apologise to Shaniqua whom throughout the film he had verbally abused. It is this type of power relationship which leads Nunley to convincingly argue that *Crash* is blind to the institutional imperatives of racism, to its memories, and to the notion that racism, as a symptom of white privilege, may hurt everyone on the level of affect, but is reterritorialized to the benefit of those marked and constructed as white and others who are interpellated by or invested in white privilege. (344)

Elsewhere, the white police officer Tom who at first idealistically fights against racism later submits to his racial prejudices when he shoots Peter. In doing so, he proves true
John’s earlier prediction “You think you know who you are, hmm? You have no idea”. Whereas John becomes a hero in a patriarchal act of helping a helpless black woman, Tom realises that resistance to prejudice is futile and that John was right. The film’s narrative politics and representation of men in crisis therefore condone white privilege and presents anti-racism as hypocritical and ineffective.

In its depiction of male characters in crisis, Crash’s racial politics also prevail over whether the amount of connections that a network character has renders them central. Although Grahame has the most connections in Crash John has the most heroic narrative arc as detailed above. Grahame, on the other hand, is a black man who becomes completely demoralised. He is blackmailed in order to protect his younger brother Peter from being imprisoned, but Peter dies and their drug-addled mother blames Grahame, failing to see that Grahame was devoted to the family. In his final scene Grahame walks away from his mother, Peter’s body, and his girlfriend Ria, ignoring Ria’s attempt to comfort him. The low angle shot as he walks towards the camera emphasises Grahame’s stoic stature as one undercut by tragedy. In contrast, three other male characters emerge as affirmative heroes, decentring Grahame’s hub position. As well as John, Cameron and Anthony play heroic roles. Early on Cameron behaves in a cowardly fashion and Anthony is violent and callous toward other people. Yet in their penultimate scenes Cameron protects Anthony and Anthony frees illegal immigrants, each thereby earning heroic status. Nevertheless, neither Cameron nor Anthony occupies as many scenes as John, and while Grahame occupies a quantitatively central network position, John emerges as the film’s principal hero. These politics symbolically reflect post 9/11 rhetoric of hegemonic American victimhood. Crash therefore uses problematic narrative politics that structures its presentation of masculine crises into a patriarchal and racial hierarchy rather than a polyphonic mélange.

Edge’s male characters endure their crises more quietly than those in Babel, Mumbai, Lantana, and Crash. Somewhat akin to Leon’s centrality in Lantana, Nejat appears in each of Edge’s three segments as well as its prologue and coda, whereas the other characters only appear centrally in one or two segments. Yet apart from the prologue and ending and the concluding scenes of each segment which focus upon Nejat, other characters share the centre stage throughout the film so that Nejat appears in these segments as an almost secondary character. Nejat’s crisis consists of having seen his father imprisoned. However, rather than appearing heroic in a stereotypically
masculine fashion as characters do in *Babel, Lantana* and *Crash*, Nejat is quietly spoken and faces situations with calm reservation. He discusses the matter of his father’s imprisonment with his cousin and his father’s love for him with Susanne. These conversations are respectively matter-of-fact and contemplative and take place amongst mise-en-scène which emphasise practicality – the cousin’s wood and metal workshop – and relaxed homeliness – standing at an open window in Nejat’s living room. Similarly, when Ali enters the jail he does not resist but merely accepts the consequences of his actions. He behaves politely to the guard and opens the cell’s window with resigned body language, his back to the camera. The lack of any close up on his face in this scene further avoids any sensationalist overemphasis of his emotion. These men in crisis are more subdued than those men in the other films who sob and yell. Nonetheless Ali’s and Nejat’s stoicism recalls that of John in *Lantana*, Yasujiro in *Babel*, Grahame in *Crash* and Nikhil in *Mumbai*. *Edge* thus presents the figure of men in crisis, signalling that this is a likely character type of network films, while it does so to more polyphonic extents than the other films discussed above.

*Code Unknown*’s male network characters also suffer crises, although none are as clearly redeemed or find resolution as those in *Mumbai, Crash* or *Babel*. To this degree *Code Unknown*’s male characters bear some similarity to those in *Lantana* and *Edge*. Unlike each of these other films, though, in *Code Unknown* male characters are not as predominant. Anne/Juliette Binoche has the most screen time and celebrity power. *Code Unknown*’s male characters are incapable of communicating clearly with others and suffer from being misunderstood.\(^{24}\) Georges refuses to give Anne advice and Anne rejects him; his father’s conversations are minimal yet he clearly worries about Jean; Jean leaves his father a note rather than talking to him but seeks to take after his older brother; Amadou puts on an air of bravado but is evidently defensive and paranoid about the perceived racial slight in the restaurant discussed earlier in this chapter; and Amadou’s father is strict but tender towards his younger son when the son confesses he is being bullied, yet his unexplained departure indicates that he is unhappy in France. To a more extreme degree than *Lantana* or *Edge*, the polyphonically incommensurable male characters in *Code Unknown* suffer quietly, showing more insecurity than stoicism. Unlike the tentative resolutions and prospects the former two films project for

\(^{24}\) The jarring juxtaposition between Georges’ letters and photos which narrate different events further illustrates this theme.
their characters, in *Code Unknown* the men in crisis remain misunderstood and their crises unresolved.

Six of the seven films feature a character type of men in crisis. However, the ways in which the films treat these characters differ. *Babel, Crash* and *Mumbai* draw attention to troubled masculinity, poverty and cultural clashes. Eventually, however, these three films create heroes who belong to the dominant social identities and reinstate patriarchal values of heroism, patriotism and paternalism. *Lantana* similarly privileges a dominant male character and thereby reinstates patriarchal values. *Edge* uses its hub character Nejat in a way that balances his narrative centrality with his observational role, giving the other characters considerable narrative focus while maintaining a pluralistic perspective. *Code Unknown*’s depiction of men in crisis uses ambiguity, mixed character emotions and open-endedness in order to question the readability and comprehension of others. *Code Unknown*, unlike the films above, features its male characters and masculine crises in much more unstable, polyphonic positions. These films therefore share character types although they treat them in markedly different ways.

Notably, there is some contention to the proposition that network films use character types and are accordingly a genre. The fact that *Love* only features males in minor and often negatively stereotyped roles (each of the husbands are insincere or deceptive) suggests that men in crisis is not a persistent character type to network films. In focusing on female characters and not men-in-crisis, *Love* is akin to another network film *Things You Can Tell Just By Looking At Her*. Moreover, “men in crisis” is not a trope exclusive to network films, and indeed all narratives require some kind of problem or crisis to create drama. Nevertheless, it is notable that regardless of whether there are central male characters, in all the network films discussed, their social cross sections show wide varieties of people who each suffer. It is important, although arguably not generic, that many network films feature multiple male characters in crisis alongside cultural others and, as the following section discusses, “strong” women. In support of the conjecture that men in crisis are a semantic element of network films, it is characteristic that the men’s senses of masculinity and power undergo revision. Their romantic and familial relationships suffer, their ideals are questioned and in some cases their ability to support themselves and their family is challenged. These matters are resolved and politicised to different degrees, but the fact that these men are driven to
question and doubt their social standing complements the prevalence of the social cross section which focuses on relationships between cultural others and hegemonic characters. I thereby propose that men in crisis is a widely used but not always recurring character type in network films which functions in service to the semantic element of social cross sections which convey complex societies.

“Strong” Women

![Figure 3.10 (Rupali in Mumbai)](image1)
![Figure 3.11 (Salma in Love)](image2)

Turning now to female characters, the seven case studies all feature women in roles which aim to emphasise personal strength and independence. On one hand, this indicates a possibly generic character type amongst the films. On the other hand, it might just show how the depiction of women in cinema has changed over the years (see Seger 2003, 261). This section examines the depictions of women in order to discover whether they have particular semantic qualities. I analyse how narrative politics affect these representations and the degrees to which the films convey pluralistic stories.

In the seven films, female characters are shown as autonomous and hard working (whether in employment or domestically). They include the stressed professional wives or partners of high powered men; such as Valerie and Sonya in Lantana, the emotionally distressed yet intelligent Jean and Christine in Crash, Rupali in Mumbai, Susan in Babel, Anne in Code Unknown, and Salma in Love. Edge also places emphasis on Yeter’s job as a prostitute, drawing attention to the dangers she consequently faces. And each of Love’s central female figures wishes to pursue careers. As noted earlier, other network films also focus predominantly on strong female characters, as do Things You Can Tell Just By Looking At Her (2000) and The Circle.
The female roles in the seven films appear to revolve around ideals of strength, independence, endurance and decisiveness. Most of the women make decisions to act independently. For instance, in Babel Amelia decides to take the American children to Mexico; in Code Unknown Anne chooses to reject Georges; in Lantana Sonya decides to stay with Leon and Jane rejects Pete; and in Love Ming decides to live independently. As do all the characters in the films, female characters suffer various social and personal problems. Yet, recalling the films’ various politicisations of male characters, the seven films also politicise female roles differently. Despite their strengths, female characters become wounded and/or distressed victims in each of the films, and the ways the films represent these aspects often risk undermining their portraits of these women as active subjects rather than passive objects. The female characters also include social outsiders. In Babel, Lantana and Edge Susan, Valerie and Lotte are foreigners, while in Crash Christine’s identity as a black woman is foregrounded as other. The films project strong woman in order to bolster their messages of social complexity and pluralism. However, as well as determining whether strong women constitute a generic character type, it is important to investigate their narrative politics so as to determine how effectively or problematically they manage such social cross sections.

While each of the seven films features strong women, suggesting they are a character type, screen time and narrative placement are important aspects of how they are treated politically. Mumbai only features one central female character amongst four central male characters. Similarly, Crash features two women, Jean and Christine, who can be termed network characters since they are presented individually in some relatively substantial rather than passing scenes. Crash’s other female characters Ria, Dorri, Shaniqua, and Kim Lee appear in very brief scenes and/or solely in conjunction with male network characters. Jean and Christine are thus only two central female characters amongst nine central male network characters. In screen time and narrative activity Lantana also privileges its male character Leon over its three central women Sonya, Valerie and Jane, as noted earlier. In contrast to its five central male characters, Code Unknown contains two central female characters Anne and Maria, and Amadou’s mother only appears individually in two scenes lasting no more than two minutes and with her family in a single scene of roughly one minute. Therefore in only a few instances do female characters occupy prominent screen time and narrative centrality in these films. This implies that despite their potentially pluralistic cross sections, these films still favour patriarchal hegemony.
Star power can also have a significant effect on female characters’ narrative prominence. In *Code Unknown* Binoche’s star recognisability and screen time balances out the film’s general lack of female presence to some extent (see this chapter 98). In contrast, in *Mumbai* and *Crash* the female actors’ star personas are dwarfed and outnumbered by those of their male counterparts. Considering *Mumbai*, Soha Ali Khan is less famous than Irrfan Khan or R. Madhavan. In *Crash* the fame of Sandra Bullock and Thandie Newton is equally matched by that of Brendan Fraser and Terence Howard who play their husbands. Yet the gender balance tips with the fame and screen time of *Crash*’s other male leads Matt Dillon, Ryan Phillippe, Ludacris and Don Cheadle. *Babel* is slightly more even with its three central female characters occupying significant screen time, although as indicated previously (see this chapter 92-3), Pitt’s heroic role trumps their victim status. *Edge* contains four female central characters and two male characters; although as noted earlier (97-8) its male character Nejat occupies a central role which frames the story. Most female-centric is *Love*, with its three network characters being solely women in order to address how polygamy affects women. Evidently the degree to which these films present polyphony vary, importantly showing that despite their potentially pluralistic formats their narrative politics often fall into familiar patriarchal hegemonic patterns. The ways in which female characters are characterised reveal further representational inequalities and contrasts, at the same time their prevalence indicates that strong women may constitute a generic character type.

The seven films recurrently feature women who are employed in difficult jobs yet are capable and independent. These qualities may generically define a character type. Yet the extent to which we gain insight into the women’s lives, work and thoughts are in many cases far less than that we perceive of the men. And in many instances their roles are conventionally feminised in ways which undermine their purported strength. In *Crash, Babel* and *Lantana* viewers receive surprisingly little information about the female characters’ jobs, and/or they work in feminised occupations. In *Crash*, for instance, although Jean and Christine are usually dressed in business attire we do not find out what their jobs are, in contrast to the male characters whose jobs constitute key aspects of the narrative. The three women we do see at work, Shaniqua, Dorri and Ria, play minor roles and as noted, Ria and Shaniqua appear overly emotional while Dorri plays a “safe”, “assimilated” Middle Eastern American. *Babel* does not reveal Susan’s job, although neither does it reveal Richard’s. Yet Susan is feminised as she
relinquishes her grief and strength to Richard when she becomes reliant on him during her convalescence. Amelia’s role as a nanny is also personalised and maternalised. She loves the American children and risks her job to see her own children across the border. Similarly, in *Lantana* we do not find out what Sonya’s occupation is, Paula’s job as a nurse does not play a key narrative role, Valerie’s role as a counsellor is strongly feminised as dealing with emotion, and Jane seems to be unemployed. Valerie’s sessions with Patrick also undermine her professionalism as he emotionally disturbs her. Moreover, although Leon’s police officer partner Claudia appears capable and independent in a masculinised job, her criticism of Leon’s behaviour does not punish him nor overrule his decisions. These three films, *Crash*, *Babel* and *Lantana*, represent women in paid work, indicating that this is a quality of the character type of strong women. Interestingly, however, they feminise and under-represent female employment in contrast to the narrative significance of male characters’ jobs.

The quality of women working in demanding occupations are also seen in *Code Unknown*, *Mumbai*, *Love*, and *Edge*, suggesting further that this is a semantic aspect. These four films explicate the female characters’ occupations and show women who make significant decisions about their lives. Interestingly, as actresses, television reporters, prostitutes, waitresses chosen for their good looks, and beauty school students, many of the female characters in these four films are subject to an objectifying gaze. For example, *Mumbai* and *Love* film Rupali and Ming in ways which accentuate their beauty and vulnerability for the viewer’s pleasure, although they are characterised as thoughtful and independent women. Rupali is shown as an attractive reporter who experiences emotional breakdowns, placing her in a passive victim role much like Susan in *Babel*. Rupali’s ultimate rejection of the media recuperates some of her strength, although her silence in this scene (in which she literally turns her back on a journalist’s camera) reiterates her victimhood. Here Rupali realises the truth of her dead fiancé’s criticism of her superficial actions as a journalist. Accordingly her power is gained by acceding to his initial derision of something in which she had faith and pride. *Mumbai* thus predicates Rupali’s decisions on masculine influences.

25 Tellingly, we do not see her counselling any heterosexual men, an aspect which conveys the highly feminised role of psychiatrists. And Valerie fails to understand her husband’s behaviour, which further undermines her professional capabilities.
In *Love* Ming is introduced in a scene using slow motion as she flicks her hair much to the delight of a group of young men. Later when Ming decides to become independent from men she nevertheless desires to be the “Indonesian Zhang Ziyi”, a global sex symbol. This shows that Ming’s version of feminism is in bad faith since she believes female power resides in the status of women as pleasurable objects. Therefore it can be argued that although *Mumbai* and *Love* present “strong” women, these characterisations to some extents convey conventionally objectifying values.

In stark contrast to *Love* and *Mumbai, Code Unknown* features Binoche in an unglamorous role, much like Cate Blanchett *Babel* and Sandra Bullock in *Crash*. In the diegesis Anne is dowdy, frazzled, and cold hearted, suggesting that she is giving a realistic performance in contrast to her frequently attractive appearances (for example, in *The English Patient* [Minghella 1996] and *Alice and Martin* [Téchiné 1998]). In this realistic, non-sexualised and non-glamorous role, and despite her depiction of Anne as intelligent, independent, yet ordinary, Binoche is called upon to depict a woman who is emotionally unstable, selfish and unpredictable. Her indirectness with Georges as to whether or not she is pregnant, her stage audition of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* in which she laughs maniacally, and her failure to intervene when she hears a neighbouring girl screaming are instances of Anne’s enigmatic characterisation. This representation of females as enigmatic and hysterical, arguably playing into a tradition which devalues female autonomy (see Mellen 1973, 2-4). Interestingly *Code Unknown* reflexively plays upon Binoche’s star persona when we see her acting for television cameras (Figure 3.12).

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26 Ming also states that she does not want to be considered a new Gong Li, since she considers Gong Li, whose fame was at its height in the 1980s and 1990s, to be old and not of her generation. This is an interesting rejection since in Zhang Yimou’s Chinese film *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) Gong Li played the fourth wife of a wealthy aristocratic polygamist. That film revolved around Li’s conflicts with the other three wives and her jealousy, with Li eventually going mad. The shared theme of polygamy in the two films and Ming’s disdain for Gong Li foreshadows on an intertextual level Ming’s eventual rejection of polygamy.
One role shows her flirting with a lover in a swimming pool, her happiness quickly turning to shock when her son climbs on a balcony endangering his life. Once we are empathetically drawn into her fear, the film cuts to show that “Anne” rather than “Binoche” is acting, and we feel disappointed and cheated. In another scene she plays a woman who is kidnapped and emotionally tortured (Figure 3.12). This scene questions the ability for us to understand anyone’s “true” self, as a voice off screen – ambiguous as to whether it is the diegetic director’s or Haneke’s – tells Anne as actor/Binoche to “show [her] true face”. She responds with confusion and distress and it becomes indiscernible for the viewer whether this response is genuine or a performance. These scenes discomfortingly expose and unsettle viewers’ willingness to become emotionally invested in and manipulated by “false” images and distance us from Anne/Binoche. In contrast to Mumbai and Love, Code Unknown more actively complicates the objectification and victimisation of its strongest female character.

Similar to Code Unknown, Edge does not objectify or glamorise its strong females. Yeter’s job as a prostitute is depicted with emphasis on her homesickness rather than sexualising her. Shots of her room illustrate her Turkish belongings such as decorative fringed lampshades and the Turkish music playing in the background. A large gaudy painting of a woman in a sexual pose with her eyes fixed on the viewer emphasises the disparity between the erotic image and Yeter’s job of constructing an erotic persona. She wears a blonde wig and squeakily tight red leather, is middle aged, tells Ali that for him she can be any nationality, and matter-of-factly states the terms of payment. Yeter is thus not portrayed as a sexual object but instead a realistic subject.
When she is threatened by conservative Turkish men who disapprove of prostitution, the job’s conflicts regarding her cultural heritage are intimated. When she moves in with Ali she wears modest, comfortable shirts and skirts, de-emphasising the erotic image. Yeter thus occupies the character type of a “strong woman”, and Edge’s resistance to visually objectifying her significantly does this characterisation justice.

In their depictions of other female characters’ seemingly strong decisions, the seven case studies also diverge. In *Love*, Salma and Siti make decisions to aid and care for other women. Salma devotes her time to the medical clinic for women and Siti embarks on a lesbian relationship. Yet these roles are somewhat problematic in their gender politics. As noted earlier (88), Siti is conveyed as an other and her lesbian relationship is thereby somewhat fetishised as exotic. For instance, one scene shows Siti and Dwi sneaking into the bathroom to make love, their figures momentarily silhouetted erotically against the window. *Love*’s depiction of Salma critiques but does not radically challenge the stereotype of a devout Muslim woman as oppressed and passive (Schmidt 2012, 36). Pak Hajji’s death comes as a *deus-ex-machina* which releases Salma from the potentiality of any oppositional action. She is freed to pursue her own interests rather than fulfilling her rebellious plan to go to Aceh by herself while he was alive. *Love* thus does not carry through in its problematisation of the stereotype. Generally in its representation of strong women *Love* shows some degree of objectification, although its feminist themes are overt.

Aside from Anne, *Code Unknown*’s female characters Maria and Amadou’s mother are also strong and complex, although they are portrayed with some contentious degree of marginalisation. Both of them voice complex insights, and Maria makes the decision to face the humiliation, denigration and loneliness of begging in Paris. Crucially, these actors are less well known than Binoche and can thereby be perceived to give more naturalistic and therein problematic performances, similar to those of the Moroccan characters in *Babel*. Grundmann (2010) argues that the way in which Maria is framed objectifies her more so than it provides explanation of her circumstances. He writes “the audience…encounters…her through the same signifying economy that channels – or even produces – the oppression…she experiences” and that

[t]he status [Maria and the older Arab man] assume in relation to the white, Western European norm does not simply produce an elucidating image of
subalternity; it always already reproduces the latter as an effect that is, as it were, consolidated in its tautological portrayal.

Grundmann here insightfully considers whether or not *Code Unknown*’s portrait of Maria naturalises her subalternity. He comes to the conclusion that viewers are directed to sympathise with Maria’s powerlessness. Yet this reading points to the fact that Maria and Amadou’s mother’s roles yield essentialist impressions of actors’ racial, ethnic and gendered identities, as opposed to recognising Binoche’s acting flexibility and talents. *Code Unknown*’s portrait of strong women thus presents intriguing problems in its casting and performances.

*Edge* also presents women other than Yeter who make strong decisions and are not defined by sexual objectification. Hannah Schygulla, in contrast to her famous youthful appearances in New German films of the 1970s and 1980s in which she dressed elegantly, fashionably, sometimes scantily and had nude scenes, is shown here in plain clothes and with little makeup. The two young women Ayten and Lotte also wear casual clothes, without makeup, while scenes of Lotte in Istanbul wearing a dress use wide and mid shots which focus on her face and actions rather than objectifying close ups. Even the scene in which Lotte and Ayten begin to kiss zooms in slowly, showing the people around them not paying any attention (Figure 3.13).

![Figure 3.13](image-3.13)

This camera movement emphasises their intimacy and simultaneous social acceptance of their connection, rather than conventionally overemphasising and/or eroticising lesbian relationships. Furthermore, the fact that Susanne and Ayten ultimately form a
female partnership signals a potential reformation of Turkey and Germany’s future and
illustrates matriarchal rather than patriarchal politics. Edge’s female characters are thus
amongst the strongest within the seven case studies.

In sum it can be argued that the seven films use a character type of “strong”
women. These characters add complexity and balance to the respective social cross
sections. As with men in crisis, this character type is not exclusive to network films,
which brings contention to the question of whether their appearance in network films is
generic. Furthermore, the ways in which the case studies portray these women differ.
The number of female characters and the strength of their screen presence in
comparison to men are unequal in Crash, Babel and Mumbai, although genders are
more evenly presented in Edge and Code Unknown. Love is an example of a tendency of
some network films to concentrate on women, displaying network films’ penchant for
giving voice to typically under-represented people. The conditions by which women are
presented as strong and independent in Crash, Babel, Lantana and Love are
problematic, however, arguably reinstating patriarchal systems despite their feminist
overtones. Edge and Code Unknown present more complicated portraits. Therefore
although “strong” women are common in network films it is debatable whether this
provides conclusive evidence upon which to decide whether or not these characters are
generic elements. Yet as with the men in crisis, it is clear that these female characters
complement the other characters in the films’ constellations and help convey social
complexity. Thus, the figure of “strong” women, in conjunction with the other recurrent
figures of cultural others and men in crisis, although broadly defined, constitutes a
recurrent figure.

Chapter Conclusion

Evidently cultural others, men in crisis (some of whom become heroes) and
“strong” women are prevalent in each of the seven case studies and exhibit comparable
qualities. The fact that these types of characters are not exclusive to network films,
however, raises doubt as to whether they can be counted as a generic property.
Additionally, the films vary greatly in the degree to which they ideologically and
politically represent these characters, which lends further doubt to the claim. However,
as I have indicated, the fact that these figures appear in conjunction with one another
throughout the seven case studies is a factor that is particular to network films. This
brings weight to the possibility that they form character types. Importantly, this chapter has not taken into account how these characters are presented as a network. Since character networks are one of network films’ defining aspects, as established in Chapters One and Two, this suggests that the ways in which network characters relate to one another may form a syntactic generic element. Therefore Chapter Four revisits the character constellations from a syntactic perspective. This chapter has proved useful in providing detailed analysis of the individual characters which forms the basis for the next chapter’s examination of their collective relationships. This chapter has also provided an in-depth critique of the seven films’ narrative politics, to which I return in Chapter Eight. At this stage it is clear that the seven case studies exhibit three general character types of cultural others, men in crisis, and “strong” women. Although these three categories are broad, it seems that their predominant conjunction in most of the films is a critical aspect which differentiates network films from ensemble and single or dual protagonist narratives. The next chapter accordingly considers the ways in which the films construct the conjunction of characters, in order to determine whether they do indeed constitute generic character types syntactically as well as semantically.
Chapter Four: Character Connections

Following on from Chapter Three, this chapter revisits the matter of whether characters are treated generically in the seven case studies. It investigates whether the use of character parallelism, stylistic devices connecting these characters and the resulting theme of network community are generic syntactic and semantic qualities. Here I draw on Barry Keith Grant’s (2007) description of character types (which Rick Altman describes as semantic factors) and Altman’s definition of semantics and syntax. Grant explains that “[i]n genre movies, character types often provide similar kinds of actions and purposes within the story” (2007, 18). This complements Altman’s claim that “shared plots, key scenes…familiar objects or recognizable shots and sounds” convey semantic elements, while the ways “a group of texts organizes those [semantic] building blocks in a similar manner” constitute syntactic arrangements (1999, 89). This chapter explores the narrative and stylistic devices that convey parallelism, connections, and the theme of network community in order to determine whether the films treat character relationships in semantic and syntactic ways.

Character Parallelism

The motif of parallelism is constructed in all of the seven films. Character parallelism is highlighted narratively in the circumstantial similarities between characters made explicit to the viewer. David Bordwell (2008a) writes that

In most narratives, as causality slackens, parallelism fills the gap. By asking the viewer to notice likenesses and differences among characters, network films are drawn to certain traditional themes that depend on parallels. (212)

Similarly, María del Mar Azcona notes that parallelism is a common aspect of network films (2010, 37). The layering and multiplication of parallels is a distinctive motif of network films, as it relates characters who may be strangers to one another without needing characters to meet or realise how they are related. For the audience the characters’ comparable circumstances, encounters and proximities create relationships, even abstract ones, and these links convey intertwined social worlds. This section explores the ways in which parallels are drawn between characters in order to ascertain whether these processes form a generic syntactic structure.
One of the ways in which network films draw parallels narratively is in comparing characters’ roles and experiences. By way of example, one outstanding case of parallelism between characters occurs in Mike Figgis’ *Timecode* (2000), a film which is not one of the seven case studies but exceptionally illustrates the motif of parallelism. *Timecode* follows four main characters, Rose, Emma, Lauren, and Alex. A minor character, Ana, mentions a Jorge Luis Borges story in which two characters discover they are the same person (a narrative trick described as *unitas oppositorum* [Weissert 1991, 237]). Ana also mentions Gottfried Leibniz’s “Monadology”, in which Leibniz argues that the whole world is made out of one simple substance which he called a “monad” and so “every Monad is...a mirror of the universe” (Leibniz 1714 qtd. in Rescher 1991, 218). These motifs are executed in the diegesis of *Timecode*.²⁷ As described in Chapter One, the screen is split into quadrants but the characters move between them, simultaneously representing plurality and connectivity (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1

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²⁷ Interestingly, the self-reflexivity of the Leibniz and Borges quotations in *Timecode* suggest that the film acknowledges generic properties. Grant quotes Thomas Schatz when he writes that “genres evolve from straightforward storytelling to self-conscious formalism” (Schatz 1981 qtd. in Grant 35). To my knowledge a parody version of a network film has not yet been made. Nor do the films reference each other, which would be evidence of generic maturity according to Schatz’s statement. However, the self-consciousness of the quotation used in *Timecode* does signal an element of “self-conscious formalism”. Everett (2005) also observes that network films often display “self-conscious manifestations” of chaos theory, such as images which recall the butterfly effect theory (164). And Azcona (2010) points out that network films often use dialogue and intertitles which refer to chaos theory (34-6). As these sources illustrate, network motifs are used amongst many examples of network films. This adds strength to the argument that network films are a genre, according to Grant’s theory. Such motifs and the questions of whether the films are self-reflexive and are created in awareness of generic properties are addressed periodically throughout the thesis (see Chapter Seven).
All of the four central characters share circumstances which suggest that they are each a version of the other. Rose and Emma are reflections of each other because as mistress and wife they are both Alex’s lovers. Emma feels estranged from him, and Rose, who fantasises about having children with him, is in a similarly strained relationship with him. Alex and Lauren (Rose’s partner) accordingly parallel as abandoned partners. Emma is a type of younger version of Lauren. Late in the film Emma is almost seduced by a young struggling actress, resembling Lauren’s lesbian relationship with Rose, Rose being a struggling actress and talented emotional manipulator. Finally, Alex connects with Lauren when she asks him for a cigarette lighter, neither knowing that the other is also in a relationship with Rose. The four characters are therefore not only connected to each other through direct encounters, but they thematically and personally parallel each other. The Borges and Leibniz references suggest the characters all appear as versions of one another, multiple personalities who ultimately converge upon the same time and represent a single person. Altogether this convergence of the four parallel characters conveys a tightly bound unit, in itself a type of community of networked characters. *Timecode*’s conclusion is simultaneously farcical and traumatic, with Lauren having shot Alex out of jealousy and the shock of the shooting affecting or yet to affect Rose and Emma. This conjoined trauma, although experienced in different ways, conveys a communal bond between the characters, thematically symbolising the implosive, self-destructive nature of vanity and jealousy in Los Angeles. *Timecode* thus shows a network community of characters who converge to represent multiple facets of a unifying theme. Thus, *Timecode*’s elaborate case of parallelism in the character network constructs a theme of network community, showcasing a key motif which runs to more subtle degrees throughout the seven case studies.

In the seven films the characters do not so overtly mirror each other as in *Timecode*, but they are often portrayed to be in comparable circumstances. Characters also contrast in ways that represent different perspectives on the same or similar issues. This characterisation develops the theme of network community. Arguably each film containing characters in comparable roles could be seen to present a cyclic view of the same role as does *Timecode*. However, network films place a strong emphasis on comparing different circumstances as representative of the whole society. This in turn conveys the diversity and complexity of society through the reflections of similar characters and their different responses to situations. Such an approach aims to convey a pluralistic, polyphonic narrative. Yet as the narratives progress and representational
politics proceed, the ways in which the films convey network community produce varying degrees of pluralism or polyphony. This chapter analyses such narrative and cultural politics in attendance with the question of whether the seven films represent network community and character connections generically.

In the seven films, the network characters frequently experience circumstances in common with one another. In Love each of the women suffers in polygamous relationships and end up finding liberation. Babel shows everyone suffering from problems of miscommunication, as they struggle to make themselves understood to others. Code Unknown conveys a similar case in which characters suffer from their inability to understand or make themselves understood to others. Lantana’s characters also suffer due to problems they have communicating with one another. Mumbai presents a patriotic picture of Mumbaikers reeling in the aftershock of the train bombings yet ultimately united by a sense of respect for other citizens. Edge galvanises its characters through circumstances of love, loss and hope in the future of Turkish German transnational relationships. And Crash unites its characters through the theme of racism, presenting a society in which “everyone’s a little bit racist” (Kim 2006 qtd. in Giroux and Giroux 2007, 745). These comparable experiences draw characters into networks that emphasise communal similarities. In connecting characters through roughly similar experiences, the films represent themes of network community. These connections between the various characters thereby suggest a syntax at play.

Specifically, the roles characters play are sometimes shown to be parallel in the way they embody different incarnations of a particular experience or social role. For instance, in Love, the three women are all in dissatisfying relationships with polygamous men and can be read to represent various stages of adulthood, partnership and motherhood. Ming is the youngest, with her future ahead of her and future lovers in mind; Siti is only slightly older but her relationship with Dwi renders her a parent figure to Dwi’s young children; and Salma represents an older stage, being ultimately widowed and being a mother to a son who is an adult by the end of the film. The three network characters in Love thereby parallel as women, at different stages of life who each experience problems with polygamy.

Babel draws on parallels between family members as it presents conceptual and visual links between parents and children. Parallels are drawn between family members,
particularly fathers, who embrace their partners and children. Richard, who embraces Susan when she is wounded, discovers that the tour guide Anwar is also a father. Similarly, Ahmed’s father embraces his son’s body when Ahmed is shot, blood staining the father and Ahmed’s white clothes just as Susan’s blood stains her white blouse and Richard’s clothes. Chieko’s father embraces her at the end of the film (Figure 4.2), just as Amelia’s son embraces her upon her deportation to Mexico (Figure 4.3). The latter two scenes use wide shots that emphasise the parent and child’s singularity within crowded surroundings and infer the obliviousness of the people around them to their suffering.

Chieko and her father stand on their apartment balcony amidst thousands of other similar apartments, and Amelia and her son stand in the middle of a busy street. Another parallel occurs between Amelia and Susan as women who are victims stranded in remote desert areas, while the fact that Richard and Susan rediscover their love for one another echoes Amelia’s reunion with an old lover in Mexico. Grief and guilt over the death of family members also ties the disparate characters together, as Chieko and her father mourn for Chieko’s mother’s suicide, and Richard and Susan grieve for their dead infant. A continuation of this theme is implied at the end of the film when Ahmed is shot in front of his father and brother. Such conceptual and thematic parallelisms in Babel draw similarities between the characters, akin to the parallels drawn in Love.

Edge relies on a strong “symmetry” of family roles (Silvey and Hillman 2010, 104). Susanne and Lotte, Yeter and Ayten, and Ali and Nejat parallel as single parents and only children who become estranged from one another. Throughout the film parents disappoint their children’s expectations and the relationships are severed, irrevocably so in two cases. Yeter is too ashamed to tell Ayten she is a prostitute and her death forecloses the possibility of a reunion with Ayten. Nejat rejects Ali when Ali kills
Yeter. And Susanne stops her financial support to Lotte after Lotte spends a few fruitless months searching for Ayten in Istanbul. Parents and children thus lose connections with one another throughout the film. Another parallel is that most of the characters search for people in a foreign country. Ayten searches for her mother in Germany, Lotte searches for Ayten in Turkey, Susanne searches for a spiritual connection to Lotte in Istanbul, and Nejat searches for Ali on the Black Sea Coast (a region foreign or not very familiar to him considering his upbringing was in Germany). As do Love and Babel, Edge portrays conceptual parallels amongst its network characters, forming communal likenesses between them. This suggests that such parallels are a key syntactic element of network films.

*Lantana* is a film which relies strongly on parallelisms to create suspense around romantic affairs and Valerie’s disappearance and to highlight the theme of widespread social mistrust. Parallels are created between characters as they fall into the roles of suspects and partners, infidels, and cuckolds. Leon and Pete, who happen to meet one evening in a bar, mirror one another as Jane’s lovers. The fact we see them separately in their roles as Jane’s lover and ex-husband before they happen to meet as strangers emphasises this unwitting parallel. This is in contrast to the observation that Jane and Sonya arguably parallel as Leon’s lovers. Whereas Leon and Pete are initially strangers to one another, Jane and Sonja know one another from their dance class, and they only intersect at this hub rather than coincidentally beyond it as do Leon and Pete at the pub. One key parallel occurs between female characters, an aspect which further illustrates that *Lantana* is disproportionately geared in its representation of women (see Chapter Three 101). This parallel is that Sonja and Valerie both suspect their husbands of having affairs: Valerie suspects Patrick of being John’s lover, and a brief scene showing John drive into an alleyway, possibly to meet a lover, gives credibility to this suspicion. Patrick and Sonya share similar roles as Valerie’s patients, Patrick and Jane both desire more commitment from the married lovers, and John and Leon have both cheated on their wives as does Patrick’s lover. When we see Nik return home late one night and throw a high heeled shoe into the bushes it also seems possible that he too is cheating on his wife. At different points during the film we are led to suspect Nik, Patrick and John of murdering Valerie. In producing suspicion regarding its male characters’ deceptive behaviour and revealing these suspicions to be false, *Lantana* concentrates on masculine crises and suggests that the expectation of men to suppress their emotions is crippling. Character parallels in *Lantana* therefore emphasise the theme of characters’ ignorance
of one another in conjunction with the viewer’s privileged knowledge of how they resemble one another. These conceptual parallels complement the characters’ physical connections, emphasising the potential for connections in a small social world. *Lantana* thus closely resembles *Love, Babel* and *Edge* in its construction of character parallels, strengthening the argument that this is a syntactic factor.

*Crash* also contains abundant parallels which help to coherently relate its large number of characters to each other and to create the sense that characters are unknowingly connected. As in the films above, conceptual parallels are created between strangers and/or acquaintances. A comparison is drawn between Daniel and Farhad when Farhad shoots at Daniel. Daniel’s daughter Lara jumps into his arms believing she is wearing her invisible protective cloak, while the bullets Farhad shoots are the blanks that his daughter Dorri selected earlier in the film. Lara thus symbolically saves Daniel, and Farhad’s daughter’s choice of blanks also saves her father from tragic consequences. This link creates a parallel between Daniel and Farhad. While the character parallels in *Crash* present a humanistic message of characters’ mutual suffering, the film’s representational practices often accentuate problematic narrative politics (see Chapter Three). The scene of Farhad’s impotent shooting represents the potential extremity and tragedy of his violence and portrays him stereotypically as an irrational other. The unexpected and providential nature in which disaster is averted here suggests that Farhad, standing with an American flag in the background and an astounded expression on his face, now has his faith restored in American providence (Figure 4.4). This scene symbolically assimilates Farhad as a humbled and repentant citizen.

![Figure 4.4](image-url)
Parallels in *Crash’s* character roles occur elsewhere between Graham and John, who are both struggling to look after their ill parents; Rick and his assistant and Grahame and Ria, who are professional partners as well as possibly lovers; Jean and Christine who both get angry at their husbands who fail to defend them when they are vulnerable to racial violence; and Ria and Shaniqua who, after getting into car crashes, both accuse the other driver of driving badly and of not being able to speak English (or, in Shaniqua’s words, “American”). A type of character switch occurs between the bigoted police officer John and the well-meaning rookie police officer Tom. When Tom shoots Peter because of his racially-charged suspicion that Peter is reaching into his pocket for a gun, as noted in Chapter Three (96-7) it appears that John’s prediction has come true and that Tom is becoming like John. Meanwhile, John saves the black woman whom he had molested from a burning car and thereby (as the film presents it) redeems his earlier bigotry (see Chapter Three 96-7). This switch makes John appear more like the earlier anti-racist Tom. These parallels give the impression that the world moves in repetitive patterns and that such connections are to be found everywhere. As in the films discussed above, *Crash’s* character parallels convincingly appear to be a generic syntactic quality.

*Code Unknown* contains more subtle character parallels than those exemplified in *Crash, Edge, Lantana* and *Babel*. Rather than parallels which emphasise uncanny similarities between characters, the parallels in *Code Unknown* draw attention to the disparities between characters’ experiences. The thematic parallels drawn between these stories convey characters’ experiences of anxiety. Conceptual parallels are present between Amadou and Georges’ fathers, since they are both introverted and struggle to convince their children to honour family and cultural traditions. Conversely, Amadou and Jean are both rebellious sons, seeking acceptance in the wider and white Parisian society as opposed to their respective African and rural backgrounds. Anne and Amadou are also both performers; Anne’s acting accentuates the interruption of and failure to communicate through verbal language while Amadou’s drumming tuition to deaf students raises the question of whether people can successfully communicate non-verbally. Coincidentally, the name Francois/Francoise is used multiple times in *Code Unknown*. Amadou’s younger brother is bullied by a boy named Francois, and Anne’s young neighbour who dies is named Francoise. Haneke also uses the names Anne and George/s for the central protagonists in many of his films. This repetition of names signals a type of stock character, recurrent in many different scenarios. These parallels
between *Code Unknown*’s characters, although not as extreme as those in *Crash* or *Edge*, function like those in *Lantana* and *Babel* to emphasise the suffering of each character. It is highly probable then that this structural motif of character parallelism is a syntactic component of network films.

Unlike the other films considered above, *Mumbai* creates surprisingly few minor conceptual parallels between characters. Nevertheless, each character suffers because of the train bombings, united in their suffering as are characters in the other six films. Rupali mourns for her dead fiancée, Nikhil experiences post traumatic stress disorder, Patil conveys his disappointment in the police department’s ineffectiveness in catching the bombers, Suresh feels that his city is under threat, and Thomas is angered to breaking point at his poverty and lowly social status, resorting to placing fake bomb threats at shopping malls in order to upset the shoppers and shop owners. Overall the film’s message concerns the “spirit” of the city (”Taglines for Mumbai” 2012), as the characters each experience hardships but come to realise during the two minutes’ silence for the victims of the bombing that they belong to Mumbai’s communal spirit. By the end of the film each character is liberated from their fears, disappointments and insecurities with the implication that Mumbai is an admirable if complex and dangerous city. Once again, although scant, the character parallels in this film resemble those of the other six case studies, providing strong evidence that character parallelism is a syntactic marker of network films.

Despite the wide variety of these seven case studies, in each of them thematic parallelisms between characters convey themes of connectivity in addition to their social networks and character types. This suggests that the motif of conceptual character parallels is a syntactic factor in network films, supporting the argument that these various films form a genre. Although the films use the motif to different degrees in terms of the extent to which they homogenise or differentiate characters, and although they vary in their representational politics regarding pluralism, gender and race, the motif is crucial to the portrait of social cross sections in all the seven films. The motif accentuates similarities between strangers and highlights the ways in which characters are unknowingly connected. Parallelism thus helps to portray characters as a collective, networked community. This strongly indicates that character parallelism is an strong semantic and generic aspect for network films.
Visual and Aural Devices That Convey Parallelism

This chapter also compares and examines the seven films’ constructions of network community through their characterisation and stylistic devices such as editing and soundtrack in order to see whether these aspects are syntactic and semantic and thereby generic. Framing, dialogue, character positions, settings, musical themes, camera angles, match cuts and other devices such as circulating objects often augment conceptual character parallelisms. Bordwell (2008a, 202), Beal (2009, 406), and Azcona (2010, 38-41) each discuss ways in which circulating objects, media, mise-en-scène, editing and soundtrack create connections between characters in network films. A circulating object is an object which is passed between characters who may or may not know one another, but through its passage creates links between the characters (Bordwell 2008a, 202). For example, another network film Twenty Bucks follows a twenty dollar note as it passes hands between various people, this circulating object connecting the characters. Not all of the seven case studies use circulating objects, which indicates that this motif is not a key generic motif. However, circulating objects are significant in Love, Babel, Edge and Crash. In each of these cases the circulating objects connect characters who are strangers to one another, further developing character parallels.

Similar to circulating objects, media connections can emphasise characters’ commonalities and differences. Wesley Beal notes the importance of media links, whereby characters are connected by materials such as seeing the same television shows and hearing the same song (2009, 3-6). Media links are intrinsically bound up with editing practices, and Azcona discusses a significant element in relation to how material connections are shown in network films. She argues that “multi-protagonist movies display a characteristic style” (2010, 7). I seek to elucidate how Azcona’s claim relates to the specific theme of network community and potentially generic practices. Of note, Azcona applies Greg Smith’s term “trades” to describe scenes in which the camera closes in on an object such as a television screen in one narrative thread and, instead of cutting to the next scene, the view widens to show that the scene has transferred, or “traded” to another (Smith 2005 cited in Azcona 40-41). This trait helps to connect separate narrative threads, smoothly relating them rather than using a direct cut which potentially juxtaposes scenes. These recurrent types of editorial links and narrative devices strongly suggest generic semantic and syntactic elements at play in these films.
My observation of these devices in the seven case studies further develops Azcona’s and Beal’s (2009) claims that these are generic motifs, as this chapter determines which of these devices, if any, are used consistently and in aid of the theme of network community.

As well as devices which link different characters such as circulating objects, media links and editorial “trades”, mise-en-scène and editing devices such as the types of transition between scenes help to create character connections. According to Altman’s theory of genre this suggests that the editing styles form a generic syntax (1999, 219). Andrew deWaard (2007) notes editing similarities between network films when he comments that “Global Social Problem” films such as the network films Traffic and Syriana use “graphic matches” or match cuts, and sound bridges in order “to find and explore global connections” (14). While not all of the seven case studies are concerned with “global” problems (see Chapter Two), they do use the types of editing techniques deWaard describes. This indicates that the films possibly use visual and aural generic syntaxes. Similar to deWaard, Azcona (2010, 41-2) discusses the soundtrack’s ability to create consistency, parallels and differences between scenes. She notes that songs which recur in different threads function much like material devices to link and/or contrast scenarios (41-2). Addressing such qualities within the seven case studies, this section notes the extents to which the mise-en-scène, editing, and soundtrack helps to create character connections and a theme of network community. Such audiovisual aspects are important because they function to define network films as films about characters who unwittingly intersect. They possibly mark the seven films as generic in terms of semantic similarities.

Despite the generality rather than specificity of character parallels in Mumbai (see Chapter Four 118), visually the film highlights media links to show clear connections between characters. In the first scene following the opening credits Suresh and his friends watch Rupali’s news report on the café television about Brahmins persecuting a group of village women. A close up on the café’s television then trades to a matching close up on the television in Rupali and her fiancé’s living room where they sit watching the report. They proceed to argue about whether Rupali’s career is honest or merely sensationalist. This theme of media sensationalism and professional integrity is carried over into the next scene when the film cuts to a mid shot of a room in the police station where Kadam and Patil are watching a television. The television, possibly
tuned to the same channel as Rupali’s report, advertises in a sensationalist tone “The truth you want to hear”. The report proceeds to address corruption in the police force. Just as Rupali came under criticism for her work, here the television report critiques Patil’s job. Including Suresh’s scene it is notable that each of these sets of characters discuss the state of contemporary morality, broadly tying their threads together. The introductions of the other two network characters Thomas and Nikhil continue this thematic parallel of the characters considering social problems. In their opening scenes Thomas witnesses a young wealthy man behaving rudely and Nikhil tells a vendor he should not use non-environmentally friendly plastic bags. These trades, media and thematic links appear in the introductory scenes in order to signal that the characters are connected despite their different social positions and despite the fact that we do not know at this point of the film if they know one another. Mumbai therefore establishes an audiovisual style supporting network community early on.

Dialogue is also used to link characters in Mumbai, as during the opening “trades” Suresh’s remarks on racism and religious conflict in France and India are followed by Rupali’s statement on her television report that “India remains bogged down with caste and religious barriers”. Religious, caste, and class conflict are here established as themes prevalent in multiple threads. The soundtrack and dialogue are also used to speak for all of the network characters and by extension the entire society. Midway through Mumbai, a song unites a montage of all the central characters at their lowest points. The song’s lyrics encapsulate the characters’ thoughts and emotions by talking about a storm which arrives suddenly with overwhelming noise. The lyrics and music resemble scenes in Magnolia, Love Actually, and Timecode, in which characters are unknowingly connected through the use of a song (see Azcona 2010, 41-2). Similarly, near the film’s end Patil makes a speech about his sense of duty to the city and reminisces on Mumbai’s social problems and history. During this speech, we cut from Patil to scenes of the other characters at points where his speech relates to their predicaments. Musing on his father’s ruinous mill strike, Patil says “Whenever I see a poor man in that mall, I feel the strike and the strife never ended for him.” While he says this the film cuts to show Thomas standing outside the hospital, in strife because he is anxious about the harm his actions have caused the old man. Patil proceeds to talk about reporters who “these days…interview anyone on the TV” and we cut to Rupali in

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28 A topic which refers to the long and controversial history of mill strikes and unemployment in India (see Chandavarkar 2003; Fernandes 2004).
the midst of her crisis of conscience about her job. Patil remarks: “These days, the trains are so crowded!” and we cut to an anxious Nikhil waiting on the platform. Patil tells the listeners: “My wife and I used to regularly go to the airport for our evening stroll…No need for security. No checks. No fear.” A cut here to Suresh in the café seated across from the Muslim man he suspects of planting bombs thematically reflects Patil’s description. This use of dialogue and intercutting omnisciently sums up the characters’ positions and relates them to one another. Patil is not aware of how specifically his remarks relate to the characters, maintaining the network as a collection of strangers who are mysteriously, coincidentally joined. In this capacity Mumbai’s characterisation and concentration on the convergence between characters physically and emotionally contribute to a theme of network community. These editing links and musical motifs illustrate a potential semantics and syntax at work.

In Love different colour filters for each of the three women’s segments accentuate their class differences, but visual parallels help to compare the three women. Love compares the characters’ experiences of similar roles in showing them in related surroundings. We see each of them in bedrooms with their partners. These scenes show bedrooms as sites of deception, disappointment and displeasure for the women, underscoring their comparable dissatisfactions with polygamous relationships. In these scenes Salma tells Pak Hajji that he needs to spend more time with her and Nadim; the newly married Siti reluctantly has her first sexual contact with Pak Lik; and Ming wakes up one morning to tell Koh Abun that she is sick, deceiving him so that she can go to an acting audition. Another visual parallel occurs in that each of the three women see reports (two televised [Figures 4.5, 4.6], one newspaper [Figure 4.7]) about the Aceh tsunami. They respond in different ways to the tragedy, but each of them show sympathy for the people affected. This media link further creates parallels between the characters. Comparable audiovisual motifs of connection such as comparable mise-en-scène and media links occur in Love and Mumbai, signalling a possible semantic and syntactic likeness between network films.
Cuts between scenes in *Babel* create emotional, visual and occasionally aural parallels. An aural parallel occurs in *Babel* when at the wedding Santiago fires two celebratory shots which frighten the American children. The film then cuts to Morocco where a radio news report talks of a terrorist shooting, indicating another misinterpreted gun shot. Similarly, the scene in which Richard and Susan’s calm on the bus is suddenly shattered by panic when Susan is shot is followed by a cut to Japan in which we confront the relatively quiet concentration of the netball game between deaf teams. But this quietness, similar to Richard and Susan’s calm on the bus, suddenly erupts when Chieko expresses her fury at the referee for calling a foul. The juxtaposition of these two seemingly unrelated scenes which both move from relative, if uneasy, quietness to noisy chaos, creates an emotional parallel between the characters’ threads. Similarly, a scene of Santiago bloodily beheading a chicken in front of the young American children cuts to a shot of Susan in the bus with blood seeping out her neck. Such cuts emphasise the emotional matches or parallels throughout *Babel*, creating a sense of connection between the characters.

Likewise in *Babel* the circulating object of the gun connects both first and third world characters as they suffer from the wounds it inflicts. Chieko’s father gifted the gun to Hassan who sold it to Abdullah, who gave it to Ahmed and Yussef to shoot jackals. With it, Yussef shoots Susan. Since Susan and Richard are delayed, Amelia takes the children to Mexico and subsequently is abandoned in the desert. The gun’s various effects symbolise the film’s themes of global inequality, and the American government’s conviction that the unintentional shooting is a terrorist act infer similar misunderstandings surrounding September 11, such as the Bush Administration’s misleading claims that Iraq held weapons of mass destruction (see Pollack 2004). *Babel* thus uses this circulating object and characters parallels to create a vision of the world as a place in which everyone’s actions affect other people’s lives. *Babel*’s use of media links, comparable mise-en-scène, and aural connections, akin to those in *Mumbai* and *Love*, suggests that these are indeed semantic elements in service to the syntax of network community.

Symmetry forms a significant part of *Edge*’s visual style, supporting its character parallels. For instance, Ayten and Lotte are shown at different times to travel
on the same ferry across the Bosporus, positioned respectively on the left (Figure 4.8) and right sides (Figure 4.9).

![Figure 4.8](image1.png) ![Figure 4.9](image2.png)

Matching shots of Yeter’s coffin being unloaded in Istanbul and Lotte’s being loaded to return to Germany also underscore the film’s mirroring motions around transnational relationships. And a circulating object and media links are important to the connections between characters. Reminiscent of the circulating object of the gun in *Babel*, in *Edge* in Istanbul Ayten asks Lotte to retrieve the gun she had hidden. This request inadvertently causes Lotte’s death when children mug Lotte and fire (what they may not realise is) the loaded gun at her. After having seen a social worker tell Nejat that Turkey’s education system is corrupt and inadequate, the fact these children seem to be street urchins further highlights themes of social inequalities. This gun therefore symbolically underscores the film’s themes of the need for non-violent politics. Media links of photos and fliers form further connections between characters in *Edge*. After Yeter’s death Nejat puts up fliers of her around Istanbul searching for anyone who knew her. When she enters the store Lotte does not recognise Yeter as the mother of her lover Ayten. It is only after Nejat has taken the flier down from his shop’s noticeboard and while Susanne is running the store in Nejat’s absence that Ayten enters the store. These missed opportunities to inform Ayten of her mother’s death and introduce Ayten to Nejat, one of the last people who knew Yeter, enhance the narrative’s open-endedness. The media link signals the arbitrariness and chance nature of the network’s connectivity, and gives the viewer the impression that there may be countless such connections which go unrecognised in everyday life. Once more, as in *Mumbai, Love*, and *Babel, Edge* uses audiovisual links to connect characters in order to support a theme of network community. This case offers even further conviction to the proposition that motifs of connection within media, objects, mise-en-scène, and the soundtrack are semantic and syntactic qualities.
*Lantana* also uses audiovisual links to draw connections between characters. Azcona (2010, 39–40) discusses how match cuts are juxtaposed in *Lantana* to emphasise characters’ emotional parallels, as well as their circumstantial parallels. She describes a cut between Valerie “thinking inside her car” to Sonya “thinking inside her house” as an “approximate graphic match” which connects the two women in their similar moods, marital circumstances and body language (39). In terms of visual composition the fact that in these images both Valerie and Sonya’s heads are turned slightly towards the right side of the screen further consolidates the match. Another visual echo between Sonya and Valerie occurs in separate scenes of the women waiting on the sidewalk in the evening sunlight for a lift from their husbands. In the first instance Sonya is waiting for Leon, whom we have discovered is cheating on his wife, but we do not yet know he is Sonya’s husband. When Sonya hears Leon’s car arrive she turns her face to the camera and smiles, the sunlight adding radiance to her expression (Figure 4.10). This radiance, we are soon to discover, is tinged by Sonya’s unhappiness in her marriage. A similar composition is shown when Valerie, waiting for John, looks towards the camera and shares a smile with a school girl across the road, on whom the backlit sun creates a halo effect.

![Figure 4.10](image1.png) ![Figure 4.11](image2.png)

Here we understand that the girl reminds Valerie of her own murdered daughter. Valerie’s gentle, poignant smile despite her grief echoes Sonya’s earlier expression with its undercurrents of sadness (Figure 4.11). The music in both of these scenes is also alike, a slow and soft piano and guitar composition whose notes sounds bittersweet. There are many sound bridges between separate narrative threads in *Lantana*, as there are throughout *Crash* and *Mumbai* and towards the end of *Babel*. Elsewhere a montage of the principal characters watching the same news report about Valerie’s disappearance provides a media link. These visual parallels and linking devices emphasise the
emotional and circumstantial similarities between characters in *Lantana*, much as they do in *Mumbai, Love, Babel*, and *Edge*. It is thus almost certain that parallels in mise-en-scène, aural links, and media links are semantic factors arranged syntactically to construct themes of network community.

Even more frequently than *Lantana*, *Crash* uses audiovisual devices to draw out a sense of network community between its characters. Cuts between scenes tend to match characters’ movements, underscoring the fact that most of these characters are the subject of and themselves conduct racist behaviour. A close up shot of the packaged gun Dorri is holding when she furiously leaves the gun early in the film is followed with a match cut to Anthony and Peter’s arm-level torsos as they barge out of a restaurant. This cut visually links these characters who never meet in the narrative, but who have all just experienced racial prejudice from employees in the buildings from which they are leaving. Dialogue is another significant connecting motif in *Crash*, fostering a theme of network community. In the opening scene which fades up from a black screen to a close up of Graham and Ria sitting in a car, we hear Graham’s voice. He muses

In any real city, you walk, you brush past people, people bump into you. In L.A., nobody touches you. We’re always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much, that we crash into each other, just so we can feel something.

This proposition that the reason for people’s violent encounters is their desire for connection is a proclamation which thematically binds together and explains the film’s ensuing violent encounters. These match cuts, mise-en-scène connections, and aural links thus foster the theme of network community between the characters, as do those in the films discussed above, strongly implying that these are syntactic and semantic tactics.

Similar to the use of circulating objects in other films, *Crash* uses objects which visually tie together characters who are strangers to one another. *Crash* presents two sets of characters who drive black Lincoln Navigators: Jean and Rick and Cameron and Christine. Anthony manages to hijack both of these vehicles. At first he and Peter traumatises Jean when they hijack hers. The hijacking results in the police officers John and Tom following another black Lincoln Navigator belonging to Christine and Cameron and John then molests Christine as she leans against the car. When Anthony
later hijacks Cameron’s Lincoln Navigator, Tom comes to their rescue. The cars thus lead viewers and characters to compare and link disparate characters, thematically underscoring characters’ class and racial prejudices. The car’s expensiveness highlights Anthony and Peter’s poverty and otherness in contrast to the white couple Jean and Rick’s wealth. Moreover, in the headlights of the police car John and Tom mistake Christine for a white woman performing fellatio on a black man. Christine finds this affronting because it signals that the white cops are prejudiced against interracial relationships as well as against black people being wealthy. Similarly, when Anthony hijacks Cameron’s Lincoln Navigator he is surprised to find that Cameron is a black man who can afford the car. The “mistaken” identities concerning the cars therefore expose class and racial prejudices. Crash’s narrative politics surrounding the linking object of the Lincoln Navigator and vehicles in general are problematic (see Holmes 2007, 315-316). As noted in Chapter Three (96-7), when Tom and John separately help Cameron and Christine out of entrapment in their vehicle, the film reinscribes imbalanced relationships of power, since the white characters rescue the helpless and threatened black characters (Hsu 2006, 133). Similar to the ways in which Babel and Edge presented the circulating object of the gun, the parallel object of black Lincoln Navigators serves to connect Crash’s characters, but reinstates its problematic representational politics. Other vehicles are key linking elements in Crash, as elsewhere Ken Ho and Daniel are shown to drive similar white vans, John rescues Christine from an upturned burning vehicle, Grahame investigates a case in which drugs are found in the boot of a policeman’s car, and car crashes open and close the film. These parallel (not quite circulating) objects help to tie characters together so that differences and similarities between their circumstances are emphasised.

Unlike Mumbai, Love, Babel, Edge, Lantana, or Crash, visually and aurally Code Unknown contrasts more so than unites its characters. Yet it creates character relationships as well as contrasts through its framing and mise-en-scène. For example, the deaf girl whom we see in the prologue wears a white t-shirt and long green skirt similar to Anne’s dowdy skirts and t-shirts. In an early scene the camera in wide shot tracks Anne and Jean side on as they walk down a boulevard (Figure 4.12). Jean does not know Anne well, only as his older brother’s girlfriend, and has recently arrived in Paris having run away from his father’s farm. Behind them we see the shops clearly and at one point Anne enters a bakery as we watch Jean continuing down the street. As they talk it appears that Anne and Jean’s relationship is noncommittal, and Anne only
reservedly offers Jean a place to stay. A later scene shot using a similar composition shows Maria walking along a road in Romania with a young boy, possibly her son or grandson. She has just returned after having been deported from Paris. As they walk dust swirls around them obscuring the background and the boy tells her about his awe of mobile phones (Figure 4.13). These parallel compositions illustrate the disparity between Jean and Anne’s comfortable and casual position on the Paris boulevard and Maria and the boy’s more inhibited experiences in Romania. Yet both scenes accentuate the characters’ emotional distance from their family members. The slow movement and the distance of the camera’s position from the characters suggest that both parties are aimless and unable to see beyond their limited horizons. Such parallels accentuate the characters’ class disparities yet emotional similarities.

Aurally in *Code Unknown*, in a scene in which Maria is hiding inside a van bound for Paris, the sound of the engine droning foreshadows the constant rhythm and loud noise of Amadou’s drumming with the deaf children at the film’s end. *Code Unknown* thus uses editing links, mise-en-scène parallels, and soundtrack connections between scenes in order to draw comparisons and commonalities between characters, as do others of the seven films. These motifs and the ensuing inference of a network community, however fragmentary, indicate that, in conjunction with the six other films, these elements can be understood to constitute semantic and syntactic generic markers.

Visual, aural and material parallels and links occur in each of the seven films in order to convey connections between network characters, suggesting that these aspects are semantic elements of network films used syntactically in service to the theme of network community. This section has elaborated upon Azcona’s statement that such films present a “characteristic style” (38) by showing how each of the seven films use these devices which ultimately appear to be semantic factors. Visual parallels in the
mise-en-scène and editing practices are the strongest evidence of a semantic element at play, since such parallels are drawn in each of the seven films to accentuate characters’ differences while at the same time connecting them. Although circulating objects and media links do not appear in all the seven case studies, the fact they function comparably in the films in which they do feature indicates that they are semantic elements. Reiterating Altman’s point that “familiar objects or recognizable shots and sounds” convey semantic elements (1999, 89), these visual, editing, soundtrack and narrative devices arguably constitute semantic elements which contribute syntactically to the construction of network community.

Creating Network Community Through Chance Encounters

It is often noted that by gathering characters together in networks in which parallels come to the fore, network films suggest that such likenesses exist all around us (Hsu 2006, 138; Bordwell 2008a, 200). Chance encounters also play a significant part in this theme, and Bordwell and Azcona note the importance of character encounters. My analysis of chance encounters elaborates upon Azcona’s (2010) and Bordwell’s (2008a) notions of parallelism and encounters since it examines the ways in which they create the theme of network community. Within his analysis Bordwell writes that

If mutual strangers create gaps or weak links, at least initially, the strong ties in the story world are provided by familiars…As they…meet new people, and those in turn may become familiars to the others. (201)

Bordwell thus classifies relationships between familiars as strong and those between people who remain strangers as weak. He goes on to write that the motif of characters connecting and becoming familiars to strangers (whether they are aware of it or not), aids the viewer’s comprehension of the network (201). I wish to see whether or not instances of characters connecting and forming a network are consistent enough throughout the seven films to constitute a generic syntax. I also wish to renegotiate Bordwell’s above claim by highlighting the fact that some links and parallels between strangers, which Bordwell describes as “weak”, are in fact equally significant to those links between familiars. Encounters among strangers frequently change characters’ perspectives on life. Parallels and encounters also importantly change viewers’ perspectives on how the characters relate to one another. In uniting the characters as unsuspecting yet closely related members of a society, these films imply that the
characters form a network community. The degrees to which characters’ situations are commensurable with one another vary between films, and accordingly the degrees to which the theme of network community is emphasised in the seven case studies differ. Attending these differences are the contrasts between the films’ narrative politics which shape the relationships between characters. Here I consider whether the depictions of chance encounters and the resulting themes of network community are comparable enough to warrant description as a syntactic quality.

*Mumbai* contains a significant amount of chance encounters between characters. In some instances characters also appear in the same proximity to one another. For instance, Thomas sells tea to Suresh, then Patil arrives and chastises Suresh for abusing an old Muslim man (Figure 4.14: Thomas in background, Suresh screen right, Patil screen left).

![Figure 4.14](image)

Nikhil and Suresh sit nearby one another in the aftermath of the bombings, and Rupali appears in the same city square as Thomas. During these scenes the audience is prompted to understand that these characters are connected not only physically but emotionally and circumstantially in their various states of suffering. *Mumbai* shows its characters to be united as ultimately patriotic and humane citizens, stressing the theme of the need for tolerance and respect. This film, initially committed to accentuating the inequality of class differences in Mumbai, eventually subsumes such concerns under the banner of a network community which renders its characters’ experiences subordinate to an authorial message (see Chapter Three 93-4). These chance encounters link the
characters and help to underscore a theme of communal bonds that non-polyphonically cut across class conflicts in India.

Chance encounters connect *Love*’s female characters to form a network community. As explained in Chapter Two (49-51), Salma, Siti, and Ming each meet one another briefly during the film. Ming serves Salma at the restaurant, Salma treats Siti and Sri at the medical clinic, and Siti and Dwi pass Ming as they move out of the neighbourhood and Ming moves in. What makes these encounters particularly meaningful and cosmopolitan is that the women help one another in small ways which influence their moves toward liberation. Salma helps Siti and Dwi escape the hold of their husband by giving them contraception. Ming avoids embarrassing Salma when she declines from pointing out that Salma’s husband is at the restaurant with his second wife. And upon moving into her new house after having discovered that Koh Abun never intended to leave his wife, Ming’s taxi serves Siti and Dwi’s escape and she gives Dwi’s daughter a teddy bear, as noted in Chapter Two (52), that Koh Abun had given her with an engagement ring attached. The bear is a symbol of outgrowing immature and dependent ties within a deceitful polygamous relationship, passed between Ming and the daughter of a woman who is also escaping a polygamous relationship. This encounter and the teddy bear (more of a transferred than a circulating object since it does not affect more than two characters) creates a positive and hopeful bond between the women’s threads, symbolising their need for liberation and independence from polygamy. *Love* presents its female characters as a community of women who achieve liberation in multiple circumstances, critiquing various ways in which polygamy detrimentally affects women’s happiness and freedom. To some extent this can be considered a non-polyphonic message. However, by foregoing a summative connecting device such as a montage, the film also preserves polyphony to a fair degree as it maintains concentration on the characters’ different circumstances. Whereas Mumbai elides the importance of class and cultural differences, *Love*’s encounters accentuate the film’s critique against polygamy by showing the women to be united throughout experiences across their class and cultural differences. As in Mumbai, Berbagi creates a strong, possibly syntactic, theme of network community through characters’ encounters, although to a more polyphonic extent.

While none of the characters encounter one another directly during *Babel*, the film uses media links to show connections between its characters. These visual links
illustrate the ephemeral yet significant connections between Babel’s characters, showing them to be part of a global community. A scene during the latter part shows Chieko flicking through television channels, one of which shows a news report about Yussef’s arrest in Morocco. Chieko does not pay much attention to the report and soon changes the channel, not knowing that her father’s gun was partly the cause of Yussef’s arrest. Similarly, we see photographs which connect the different threads, as in Morocco Richard shows the tour guide photos of Mike and Debbie, and on the wall in Chieko’s apartment hangs a photo of her father in Morocco with the man who sold the gun to Yussef and Ahmed’s father. Babel also uses character parallels in order to highlight the likenesses between characters and stresses a humanistic message of the fundamental similarities between people.

These parallels imply that the characters experience trauma and family relationships in comparable ways, despite their circumstantial differences and privileges. Although the film’s social critique is directed (broadly and vaguely) against these inequalities, the fact that these characters are portrayed as fundamentally alike maintains a rhetoric that fails to pluralistically articulate characters’ differences. On the one hand, the film shows a humanist message in showing the parallels between these characters. On the other hand, although the parallels attempt to bring sympathy rather than derision to these characters, as we saw in Chapter Three (86), they are nevertheless stereotyped and present a cultural hierarchy. The parallels indeed place the characters within a narrative hierarchy that sees the American couple’s guilt and grief redeemed, in an orientalising way attributes the onset of emotional healing to the Japanese characters, and perpetuates the association of guilt and grief to the third world Moroccan and Mexican characters. With these latter stories presented as eternal and overwhelming, the audience is encouraged to cathartically excuse the problems of global inequality as a general “human condition”. Although there are not many direct encounters between Babel’s network characters, there are many links or virtual encounters between them which construct a theme of network community, albeit non-polyphonically, as Bruns convincingly argues (2008, 189). This indicates that, despite their different narrative politics, Mumbai, Lantana, and Babel each construct network community through various means of character encounters, illustrating a possibly syntactic element of network films.
In *Edge* estrangements between family members are catalysts for characters’ encounters and parallels. Nejat respects Susanne’s grief while Susanne inspires Nejat to seek reconciliation with Ali. Interestingly Nejat is inspired in part after he and Susanne realise the parallels between the Bible and the Koran’s stories of the father Abraham/Ibrahim who is willing to sacrifice his son Ishmael/Isma’il, which reminds Nejat that his father had told him he would rather defy God than kill him. These religious confluences typify the film’s exploration of relationships, exchanges, and parallels across historically significant borders (Silvey and Hillman 2010, 100). The encounter between Nejat and Marcus Obermüller, the owner of the German bookstore in Istanbul also creates a parallelism, as Marcus desires to return to Germany and Nejat, having taught German literature in Germany, has returned to Turkey. Nejat, Lotte and Ayten are connected through the context of education, as Nejat is a lecturer and Lotte and Ayten are students, but with very different experiences in education. These encounters and parallelisms articulate the different yet similar experiences of the characters, inferring that Turkish and German relationships are thoroughly intertwined despite the political rhetoric to the contrary that protests Turkey’s accession on the basis of the European Union’s conditions. In contrast to *Babel*, *Edge* uses character encounters and parallels to point to the two countries’ historical and cultural depths and emphasises characters’ abilities to move forward and change. This film polyphonically expresses complexity and poses questions rather than provides cathartic narrative monologism as *Babel* does. Formally resembling *Mumbai*, *Love*, and *Babel*, *Edge* provides further conviction that character encounters are used to syntactically construct the theme of network community.

In *Lantana*, chance encounters emphasise the quality of being strangers who unwittingly share things in common. For instance, when Leon bumps into a man jogging (whom we later discover is Claudia’s crush), the fact that the man bursts out crying expresses a similar emotion to Leon’s own barely-suppressed emotional distress (Figure 4.15).
This encounter thus highlights an emotional parallel between the two characters, both men in crisis. Another fraught encounter occurs between Valerie and Pete (who do not know one another) when Valerie, in a state of distress and paranoia, accuses the passing Pete of having said something insulting to her. This scene highlights the chance nature in which the two network characters become connected. Furthermore, when afterwards Pete seeks respite in a pub he happens to meet Leon. Neither men realise their familiarity as Jane’s lovers, but they coincidentally share a bonding experience. Leon tells Pete about his encounter with the jogger and Pete, who says that he sometimes cries, prompts Leon to admit that at times he too feels like he needs to cry. In contrast to Pete’s honesty about his feelings, Leon claims that it is not manly to cry. Leon’s conception of masculinity is thereby revealed to be the problem which leads to his emotional numbness and his marital crisis. These encounters underscore the themes of insecure masculinity, the fragility of emotions, and grief accompanying loss in relationships (Duncanson et al. 2004, 15-16). The final coincidental meeting between Claudia and her “mystery man” at their regular restaurant also stresses the unpredictability of relationships. Claudia and the man had up til then only smiled at one another and in an earlier scene Claudia left just before he arrived. Their paths finally connect and the two are shown happily meeting near the film’s conclusion. Yet since many relationships in the film have failed, we are reminded that the future of this relationship is unknown. Similar to Edge’s viscerally cosmopolitan encounters, encounters in Lantana are direct and interactive, although Lantana’s encounters are brief. Dramatic irony further exposes characters’ unwitting similarities, much like those in Mumbai, Babel and Love. Lantana also aims to convey the complexity and pluralism
of its characters’ experiences in showing an eventual dissolution and questioning of friendships and relationships. It sits somewhere in between Babel’s narrative propagation of commensurability and Love’s and Edge’s portraits of more polyphonic experiences. The recurring use of character encounters to construct a theme of network community in such different films indicates that this may indeed comprise a syntactic quality.

Throughout Crash brief yet significant multicultural and cosmopolitan encounters occur between characters. Jean discovers that her own friends are shallow, realises that her Latino maid Maria is the closest friend she has, and in a demonstration of “visceral” cosmopolitanism (Nava 2007, 12) Jean embraces Maria. Maria’s own opinion on the relationship is absent, however (Nunley 2007, 342), as she says nothing despite Jean having mistreated her earlier. Crash thus predictably inscribes a narrative bias in favour of the white character. A cosmopolitan action also occurs when Anthony frees a truckload of illegal Cambodian immigrants, although Catherine Prendergast (2007) observes

Anthony’s act of kindness to the anonymous Asians – the only clearly illegal immigrants of the film – is to provide them the entrée into the land of opportunity by allowing them to sit on the sidewalk. (348)

Anthony’s cosmopolitan action is not as concretely communal as those in Edge. Instead it resembles the symbolic but temporary connections found in Babel. An encounter between Cameron, Anthony and Tom also enacts a cosmopolitan relationship during Cameron’s period of avoiding Christine, Anthony’s separation from Peter, and Tom’s independence from John. As noted in Chapter Two (66), Anthony has tried to hijack Cameron’s Lincoln Navigator, and Cameron, angered, drives them both haphazardly through a quiet neighbourhood. Tom’s police team corner the vehicle. Cameron protects Anthony by telling the police he is alone, and Tom helps Cameron to remain unharmed by telling the other officers to back off. Tom thus atones for his earlier inaction in the scene in which John Ryan abused Cameron’s wife Christine. This time he helps Cameron. Cameron scolds Anthony for his bad behaviour and his perpetuation of a negative stereotype of violent black men, telling Anthony he is ashamed of him. Similar to Tom’s redemption in this scene, Cameron’s protection of Anthony and defence of a strong, integrity-based black identity redresses the shortcomings for which Christine had earlier criticised him. These encounters redeem the characters’ previous failures to
help Christine, as Tom and Cameron both take action and defend victims. Tom and John respectively rescue Christine and Cameron where previously John had molested Christine while Tom and Cameron stood by passively. These cosmopolitan actions are meant to redeem the characters’ previous failures to uphold social respect and harmony.

In most of Crash’s character encounters, cosmopolitan action between strangers produces a positive vision of communal harmony. These chance encounters and switches in behaviours between characters often help to present the film’s themes of the pervasiveness of racism and the need to respect others. This narrative device thereby constructs a network of characters who are communally connected in their similar and visceral experiences, recalling those similar encounters and themes in Mumbai, Love, Edge, Babel, and Lantana. However, none of these relationships are anything more than temporary. Moreover, Crash presents its character parallels in ways which augment the problematic narrative politics which in turn stereotype cultural others, silence the voices of cultural others, and present non-polyphonic hierarchical biases towards hegemonic characters. Aside from the different degrees in the strengths of these connections, each of these films use encounters and connections to construct a theme of network community, lending weight to the proposition that this is a generic syntactic motif.

In contrast to the other films discussed above, there are few encounters between network characters in Code Unknown. The temporary and rare occurrence of character encounters underscores the film’s investigation into whether community is a superficial notion. The first cosmopolitan interaction occurs when Amadou defends Maria’s dignity against Jean who tossed a piece of rubbish into her lap. The second takes place when the Arab man defends Anne from abuse from the Arab youth on the metro (see Chapter Two 62-3). However, the extent to which these actions successfully defend and/or represent hope for the future of community in Europe is scant, as they are isolated and in the former case ineffectual instances amongst many other negative scenarios. The infrequency of character encounters in Code Unknown compared to those in the other films highlights Code Unknown’s far more critical approach to representing network community. The few cosmopolitan encounters, like those in the other films, consider the possibility of a positive, proactive community amongst different people as represented by the social cross section. Code Unknown’s critical and doubt-filled portrait of a network community renders characters distinct and their experiences irreconcilable. However, this film also questions the viability of such a vision of community,
reminding the viewer that there are considerable irreconcilable conflicts between people. While *Code Unknown* is more critical and speculative about the likelihood of network community, as in the other six case studies it constructs this theme through character encounters. Evidently, this motif is so recurrent as to suggest strongly that it is a syntactic element of network films.

Although they show very different attitudes towards it, each of the seven films constructs a theme of network community amongst their social cross sections. Network films provide a range of social messages and produce varying degrees of narrative polyphony surrounding the idea of network community. Many of them promote the need for humanism amongst the community and others veer towards a more contemplative stance on the conflicts and inequalities which inhibit notions of community. Nevertheless I contend that the theme of network community constitutes a generic syntax. The seven films use the semantic “building blocks” of conceptual and stylistic motifs “in a similar manner” to syntactically draw parallels and encounters between characters and produce portraits of network community (Altman 1999, 89). This theme is a distinctive and conceivably generic aspect of network films, as it galvanises characters into a collective and explores notions of social interrelationships in similar ways.

**Chapter Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter I have analysed whether the seven network films share semantic and syntactic elements so as to determine if they constitute a genre. I have therein expanded upon and contributed to Azcona’s (2010), Bordwell’s (2008a), and Beal’s (2009) discussions surrounding these devices and stylistics (this chapter 119). In looking at narrative and editing practices and the resulting theme of network community in the seven films it is evident that despite their local differences these various network films do use common semantics and syntaxes. The narrative devices of conceptual parallels, links in the mise-en-scène, soundtrack and editing connections, as well as character encounters semantically and syntactically construct themes of network community in each of the seven case studies. Additional recurring motifs which enhance the themes of connectivity and network community include match cuts, circulating objects, and media links. The narrative and stylistic elements discussed throughout this chapter indicate that network films possibly constitute a genre. Despite
their different stories, structures, range of characters, social issues, and narrative politics, they emphasise the ways in which connectivity restructures social relationships. These films consider and question the nature and/or success of cosmopolitanism in multicultural societies. They consistently foreground modes of connection and construct portraits of network community which constitute definitive semantic and syntactic markers. At this stage, the proposition that these films constitute a genre appears promising. The following chapter explores the representational politics of their character networks in regard to their plots and depictions of time, in order to determine whether these aspects are also treated generically.
Chapter Five: Plots and Time

Rick Altman’s theory of genre indicates that plots and temporal settings often help viewers to identify particular genres (1999, 89-90). Westerns, for instance, are typically set in the Wild West of 1800s America and the gunslinger hero usually saves the day by driving unwanted people out of town. The seven case studies firmly satisfy the observation that genres are often set in similar temporal settings, as each of them are set contemporaneously or within recent years. This does not preclude network films being set in other periods, but to my knowledge there have been none so far which do so (nor do any of the films David Bordwell and María del Mar Azcona discuss challenge this idea). Altman’s observation that genre films use comparable plots is the key focus of this chapter. Various commentators note that there are plot structures which viewers have come to expect of network films (Hsu 2006, 134-5; Barnard 2009, 208). Bordwell claims that “[a]s viewers, we tend to expect that at least some vagrant souls will hook up by the conclusion of [a network] film” (2008a, 201). Authors also note that the films’ “syuzhets,” or edited structures (Bordwell 1985, 50) often draw attention to and/or manipulates themes of causality and chance in the “fabulas,” the stories that are told (49) (Ebert 2007; Elsaesser 2008; Beal 2009; Everett 2005; Hassapopoulou 2008). The seven network films manage their plots and temporality in an assortment of ways. They range from having jumbled and circular plots to relatively linear ones. This chapter examines and compares their plot structures and temporal scopes in order to ascertain whether they present these aspects in generic ways.

One distinctive aspect of network films’ plot structures which deserves scrutiny is the way in which the films emphasise the simultaneity of narrative threads in order to relate and shape their characters’ experiences into a coherent narrative. I use the term simultaneity to describe instances in which characters are shown to experience the same point in time, whether or not they also occupy the same space. Character convergences in the same spaces at the same time are of course simultaneous. And editing devices such as a montage or successive scenes showing different characters in different areas can convey simultaneity as they may infer that the characters are seen at the same point in time (Bordwell 1985, 77). The aspect of simultaneity can significantly influence the films’ narrative politics. This chapter primarily explores whether the seven case studies present similar plots and generic treatments of simultaneity, while secondarily I analyse how these aspects influence the films’ narrative politics.
A/synchrony in Diegesis and Plot

An important influence on my interpretation of the representation of time and polyphony (see Chapter Two 70-72) in the seven case studies is Allan Cameron’s discussion of the representation of time in modular narratives (2008). Cameron raises a number of issues which pertain to my selection of network films, in particular the idea of a/synchrony, which I explain presently. Cameron focuses on what he terms “modular narratives”, defining these as films which “foreground the relationship between the temporality of the story and the order of its telling” (1). The term “modular”, similar to the term “database narrative” (see Bizzocchi 2005), describes the fact that narratives can be broken up into sections which can be arranged and conveyed in non-linear ways. Cameron argues that some network films such as Short Cuts and Magnolia cite modular time, but that they “downplay modular form” since they maintain transparent and linear narratives, and therefore “should not be considered modular narratives, even though they bear some elements in common” and even though they do contrast with conventional linear narratives (15). This is an interesting conclusion in conjunction with Bruns’ assertion that Magnolia conveys polyphony but Short Cuts does not (2008, 205). While a film in Bruns’ view may be polyphonic in terms of its juxtaposition of characters’ threads, in Cameron’s theory that same film strongly unites its threads through its use of temporally transparent narratives. In order to discuss how the films use and convey temporality and whether or not these representations engender narrative polyphony I propose to use these two theories in conjunction with one another.

Key to Cameron’s discussion of modular time is his use of the concept of a/synchrony, which alongside polyphony is the second concept I discuss throughout this chapter. In his discussion of Timecode and Code Unknown (which he argues do use modular narratives), Cameron addresses the simultaneous rupturing of time in their syuzhet but cohesion of the diegesis in their fabula. Cameron develops the ideas of narrative synchrony and asynchrony from W.J.T. Mitchell’s observation that “the ‘controlled asynchrony’ of voicemail, email and online forums allows for more efficient and convenient communication” (Mitchell 1995 cited in Cameron 2008, 144). Cameron argues that “[t]he synchronic spatiality of the modern city is thus overtaken by the asynchrony of electronic media” (144). Cameron addresses how Code Unknown’s use of long takes, music, and its representations of journeys, mobility, global spaces,
surveillance, simultaneity, and technological time contribute to its narrative asynchrony. For example, Cameron points out that asynchrony is present in the fact that “Code Unknown features a number of phone calls…but…we are only ever allowed to hear one interlocutor, and the content of the discussion is often difficult to decipher.” (153). Such moments of uncertainty as to how the scene we are watching relates to the narrative and the temporal plot help to convey asynchrony. Asynchrony is an aspect which enhances my discussion of the films’ narrative politics.

Drawing on Appadurai’s account of the “flows and disjunctures” of globalisation, Cameron (2008) also discusses the extents to which asynchrony can convey disjunctures between characters’ experiences. Appadurai highlights ways in which flows of information, culture and finances are globally “uneven”, counter to the common assumption that globalisation has led to cultural and economic homogenisation around the world ([1990] 2006, 88). Cameron accordingly writes that Code Unknown “depicts a transnational ethnoscape defined by flows of immigration (legal and illegal) that are not always commensurate with flows of capital and culture” (2008, 158). Since network films concentrate on multicultural “ethnoscapess” and influences of globalisation, it is useful to see how they each depict disjunctures and convergences (Appadurai [1990] 2006, 589; Cameron 2008, 158). Demonstrating this, Cameron observes that Timecode and Code Unknown both emphasise electronic media as means of creating asynchrony which “draw[s] temporal unity into question” (146). He states that films such as Timecode and Code Unknown “generally present a temporally fractured but ontologically unified world” (141). In other words, the films use visually and stylistically disruptive, complex editing methods, and the characters’ experiences diverge in ways which highlight their individuality and incommensurability. Yet viewers understand that these characters exist in the same diegesis, as the characters’ convergences in time highlight this ontological unity. Asynchrony is a narrative motif which aids the representation of plurality to various extents. It complements the conception of polyphony as a representation of “parallel lines moving contingently in rival and incompatible spheres” (Bruns 2008, 205; see Chapter Two 70-72). Yet the theme of polyphony remains distinct from asynchrony, since the films may use synchronic narratives yet still can convey thematic polyphony. Although not all the seven films are modular narratives, it is useful to ask whether, in drawing attention to temporal contingency and convergences in their narratives, these case studies might use aspects such as synchrony, asynchrony and the depiction of time in comparable, generic
ways. Throughout this chapter I focus on how temporal a/synchrony, disjunctures and polyphony are expressed in the seven case studies, examining whether the films use these elements in generic ways.

Frequently in studies about time in cinema, scholars draw on Gilles Deleuze’s renowned study on the “time-image” and the “movement-image” in cinema. Although Deleuze discusses the treatment of time in cinema in great detail in his “taxonomy” ([1983] 1992, xiv), I am not focusing on his ideas. This is because although Deleuze’s theories innovatively focus on how movies ontologically embody and actualise time and space, they do not closely apply to how the films narratively represent time and space (Deleuze [1983] 1992, xiv; see Cameron 2008, 111). Deleuze explains of his study, “The great directors of the cinema may be compared, in our view, not merely with painters, architects and musicians, but also with thinkers. They think with movement-images and time-images instead of concepts” ([1983] 1992, xiv). Examples are present in network films of Deleuze’s theories of the “movement-image”, the idea that “cinema does not give us an image to which movement is added, it immediately gives us a movement-image”, with individual shots making up “mobile” sections of duration ([1983] 1992, 2, 24-5); and the “time-image”, identified as “movement which subordinates itself to time”, most clearly seen when films convey “time…out of joint” ([1985] 1989, 271). For instance, the “movement-image” is visible in Mumbai’s montage showing a road chase, and Code Unknown’s use of the long take and cuts to black are prime examples of the “time-image” in which duration unfolds. Thus, Deleuze’s theories focus on the ontology of the image rather than the politics of the narrative. However, my analysis is of how time integrally relates to the construction of narratives and themes. My approach corresponds more closely with Paul Ricoeur’s “hypothesis…that narrativity and temporality are closely related” (1980, 169). Therefore it is necessary to use the relevant narrative rather than ontological film theories. Notably, Cameron himself only uses Deleuze’s idea of the “time-image” over a few pages in his book (2008, 17, 108-112), applying it to Memento and Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. Since my study places a strong emphasis on analysing narrative politics, I therefore prefer to use Cameron’s particularly relevant theory of a/synchrony rather than Deleuze’s fascinating but contrasting approach to time in cinema.
Visual Styles of Realism as a Generic Marker?

In contrast to Azcona’s argument that network films “do not share an equivalent immediately recognizable mark of visual style” (38), I contend that their use of the visual styles of realism qualifies as a generic semantic aspect. I propose that these films use visual styles of realism when depicting their settings in order to convince the viewer that the stories they tell can happen anywhere and to anyone. They do so using narrative temporality, cinematographic styles, and the relations between the texts and the readers in terms of their surrounding and portrayal of social contexts and ideologies. This latter point refers to Colin MacCabe’s idea that “Realism is no longer a question of an exterior reality nor of the relation of reader to text, but one of the ways in which these two interact” (1976, 25). Also in line with Paul Willemen (1972), I consider realism as “a tendency or aspiration” and a “subjective value judgement”, based on how audiences relate real life to what they see on screen (37). Andrew deWaard (2007) compellingly argues that realism is a critical point of the films’ representations of global social problems (14). Network films seek to convince viewers that, far from being carefully constructed stories in which characters conveniently collide, intersect and complement one another in a contrived network, they in fact show entirely plausible contemporary “slices of life” or “life as a whole” (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197; see Chapter Two).

Integral to the fact that network films depict contemporary settings is the way in which they use a variety of visual, aural and editing techniques to convey a sense of realism. These techniques affect how the viewer perceives time in the fabula. For instance, Code Unknown’s long takes convey a sense of real time, whereas fast paced editing in Babel and Mumbai realistically convey the characters’ feelings and perspectives of tension and excitement. The seven films use a barrage of realist techniques. All the films use location shooting; and as noted in Chapter Two, they often make explicit and inferred references to real events and real social problems. Archival footage is used in Mumbai and Love, and Mumbai re-enacts real events. Long takes, handheld and static camera styles are favoured in Code Unknown and Edge. Love uses voice overs in order to intimately convey characters’ psychological states, while Babel

29 Interestingly MacCabe’s 1976 essay concentrates on American Graffiti (Lucas 1973) and briefly discusses Nashville, two examples of multi-protagonist films from the 70s. He argues that these two films “reproduce the major strategies and procedures” of “traditional realism” where “the struggle is to represent reality as effectively as possible” (8).
uses close ups and occasionally mutes the soundtrack to convey Chieko’s experience of being deaf (see Hassapopoulou 2008). *Babel* and *Love* use colour filters to differentiate settings’ atmospheres and these colour filters can also influence how time is portrayed. For example, in Salma’s segment white and green colours conveys a sense of calm and time as regular and linear, whereas Siti’s yellows and browns suggest time is perceived to be slower, while Ming’s vibrant colours convey faster, more fleeting temporal movement. Summarily, despite their different specific styles, each of the films uses visual styles of realism to convey their stories believably. Although their styles vary, prompting Azcona’s statement that network films “do not share an ... immediately recognizable mark of visual style” (38), I contend that it is justifiable to claim that realism plays a significant and consistent role in network films. The fact that each of the films uses styles of narrative and visual realism suggest that this is a generic semantic element.

**Plots and Temporal Schemes**

Unlike the similarity between the seven films’ semantics of common topics, character types or syntax of character parallels, or the fact that they all use visual styles of realism, their plots and representations of time vary. This raises doubts about whether they may be called a genre. *Mumbai, Code Unknown, Crash* and *Lantana* follow generally linear plots, although they contain prologues (and in *Code Unknown*’s case a bookending epilogue). *Babel*’s plot is temporally jumbled, while the triptychs *Love* and *Edge* set their different segments’ beginnings and ends at different points in time. The variety of these narrative structures brings doubt to the possibility that network films constitute a genre.

Nonetheless, simultaneity between the different characters’ threads conveyed through physical encounters and/or editing techniques is a key element of the films. The depiction of simultaneity influences how pluralism is conveyed. As well as conveying simultaneity, network films use plot structures to create degrees of asynchrony. It can be argued that the parallelisms and encounters between characters (see Chapter Four) also affect the temporal framework, since they contrast the characters’ experiences of time. The presence of multiple characters and possibilities of connection that remain unexplored or unrealised can also rupture or manipulate temporal unity. Since the viewer becomes aware of characters’ parallels when they converge simultaneously,
appear in the same spaces at different times, or meet but fail to realise their similarities, these missed potentialities can also haunt the film. The ways in which the films treat simultaneity in thematic, narrative and physical convergences between characters’ threads is examined here to determine whether they offer generic traits. The following section discusses the use of prologues and codas in the seven films, the next proceeding to analyse the types of plots and settings used, before finally exploring how character convergences shape aspects of simultaneity and polyphony.

**Prologues and Codas**

One notable element of the seven case study films is that five of them use prologues to introduce their themes. Prologues work in different ways in these instances: to create a symbolic space or allegory in preparation for the film’s themes by using non-diegetic scenes (*Code Unknown* and *Mumbai*); to create suspense by showing an unexplained diegetic scene that will later be explained (*Crash* and *Lantana*); and to introduce the film’s themes using a non-suspenseful diegetic scene (*Edge*). In these instances the films prepare us for the ‘main event’ of the narrative body. At the other end, codas, or epilogues, usually create a sense of narrative closure (Bordwell 1985, 159). *Code Unknown* is the only film of the seven to use a coda, with a bookending sequence that returns the viewers to a familiar scene which re-emphasises the themes raised at the outset. *Lantana, Crash* and *Edge* circle back to, work up to and pass beyond the prologue’s scene, allowing time for narrative resolution and/or the projection of future scenarios. The fact that not all of the case studies present prologues and only one contains a coda suggests that these are not generic elements amongst all network films. However, the representation of a/synchrony through these scenes deserves analysis in view to determining whether the plots represent time generically.

In *Code Unknown*’s case, a strong element of asynchrony is present in both its prologue and coda. *Code Unknown* is prefaced and concluded by a scene of deaf children playing a game of charades, in which they fail to hit upon the correct answer to their classmates’ facial expressions and body movements. These scenes, featuring children of different races, symbolically establish and remind viewers of the film’s key themes of the difficulty of communication and tensions of multiculturalism. It is not until halfway through the film that we are shown that these children are students in Amadou’s drumming class, and this constitutes a minor point in the narrative. These
scenes thereby function more abstractly than concretely related to the diegesis. They convey a strong message of polyphony between narrative voices as the charades remain unanswered.

*Mumbai’s* linearity is evident even within its prologue, unlike the abstract relationship of the prologue and coda to *Code Unknown’s* central narrative. *Mumbai*’s prologue shows shots of Bombay/Mumbai’s historical icons and events such as the Taj Mahal Hotel (which became the site of a terrorist attack in the year of the film’s release), a human pyramid during the Dahi Handi celebration of the Hindu festival of the birth of Krishna (Figure 5.1), the Central Library (built in 1830) which has since been renamed the Asiatic Society of Mumbai, Air India aeroplanes, and a wide shot of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (formerly the Victoria Terminus, Figure 5.2).

![Figure 5.1](image1.png) ![Figure 5.2](image2.png) The footage leads up linearly to the present, transforming from black and white into colour images as gradually the frame broadens. This situates the events of the film as another chapter in the city’s long history of conflict and change, presenting a clearly defined linear temporal perspective.  

Unlike *Code Unknown*, *Mumbai*’s prologue establishes a key “unity” to the narrative (Bruns 2008, 206), centring on the city of Bombay/Mumbai in order to convey the ongoing “spirit” of the city (“Taglines for Mumbai” 2012) in a non-polyphonic fashion.

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30 I use the term linearity in relation to the *syuzhet*. On a broader note David Martin-Jones (2011) discovers that popular Indian cinema uses a concept of time as “a dharmic whole” (202). This roughly means “a conception of the whole…and a guide or law concerning one’s actions within it…” (213). He argues that the Ramayana and the Mahabharata greatly influence popular Indian cinema and that this accounts for the use of multiple storylines and narrative “detours” in the films (207). It could be argued that Mumbai fits this description, as it portrays a broad spectrum of society in which characters learn to act ethically. By extension, it could be argued that in their common topic of “life as a whole” (Empson qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 217; see Chapter Two), all network films convey a “dharmic whole”. This necessitates a distinction between a film’s *syuzhet* and its thematic implications. While observing that Mumbai presents a linear narrative, I do not discount the fact that it strives to present a “dharmic whole” or sense of “life as a whole”.
Similar to Mumbai and Code Unknown, Crash opens with a prologue. After a series of dissolves showing blurry car headlights symbolically moving in different directions, during a fade to black and a fade up to the opening diegetic scene we hear Grahame musing on car crashes and people’s desire for connection, the underlying message of the film. These shots and the accompanying ethereal yet sombre music introduces the film space and time as mysterious, spiritual, puzzling and disorienting. As Ria argues with Kim Lee about their crash, Grahame walks over to a crime scene in the scrubland beside a road and sadly looks at a shoe dislodged from a corpse that is off screen. The scene dissolves to blank whiteness and then to the Los Angeles skyline. The word “Yesterday” appears on screen, implying that we will return to and understand the opening scene once this “yesterday” runs its course. Crash opens in this way with a clearly marked temporal module which ultimately is rendered synchronous, in conjunction with the film’s ultimately non-polyphonic “gratifying and self-satisfied resolution” (Bruns 2008, 205). The implied linearity of Crash’s prologue thereby resembles the synchronous quality of Mumbai’s prologue more than the asynchrony of Code Unknown’s.

Reminiscent of Crash’s opening scene, Lantana opens with eerie sounds of cicadas and other insects chirping accompanying a slow pan of a woman’s corpse tangled in the undergrowth of lantana, before fading to black to pursue the main narrative. The opening scene, tracking from toe to head, poses the woman’s identity and cause of death as mysterious. The film proceeds to depict the events leading up to and beyond this image. Unlike Crash or Mumbai, Lantana maintains a degree of narrative asynchrony, although less abstractly than Code Unknown. The lack of temporal markers in Lantana’s opening is unlike the marked temporality of Crash’s prologue, as for at least half of the film it is not intimated who the victim is or whether her death occurred in the past or will occur during the film. Lantana’s initial lack of temporal anchoring is in contrast to Crash’s upfront temporal anchoring which implies a resolution from the outset. Somewhat reminiscent of Code Unknown’s narrative and temporal ambiguity, Lantana thus opens with a use of narrative uncertainty which remains asynchronous for much of the film. However, the extent to which the scene augurs the film’s treatment of a/synchrony and polyphony is mixed, as this chapter later discusses.
Unlike Crash and Lantana in which the prologue is presented as a puzzle for the audience and characters to solve, Edge’s prologue and ensuing triptych produces a more reassuring and cumulative understanding of how the characters’ lives intersect. The prologue symbolically foregrounds a motif of travelling, signalling the film’s presentation of time as constantly progressing rather than static or stagnant as in Code Unknown. During this scene Nejat stops at a small service station in rural Turkey on his way to the Black Sea Coast. He buys some snacks, and the shop owner tells him the song audible on the radio is Kâzım Koyuncu singing “Ben Seni Sevduğumi” (“That I Love You”). This is a folk love song whose lyrics connote a lover’s death and refer to the death of a father, pre-empting Edge’s own themes (Chris 2009). Nejat then drives off and looking out from the windscreen the camera shows him passing through two tunnels, continuing his journey. Through the rhythmic and lyrical movement of the now non-diegetic music the scene conveys ongoing motion. Combined with Nejat’s journey, the whole scene strongly conveys relaxed yet inevitable temporal movement. The spatial and intertextual importance of this scene is discussed in Chapter Six (186-8). We discover later in the film that the prologue chronologically fits towards the end of the fabula. When we revisit this scene motion is again foregrounded, and this time the same song is heard throughout the scene non-diegetically, sung by a female singer. On first viewing the scene stands alone as an introduction to the film’s motif of journeying. Yet as we realise that the film’s three segments jump around in time and return to the scene near the film’s conclusion, this movement and convergence towards the same point in time provides a sense of inevitability, narrative closure and it re-establishes a synchronic framework. At this point, similar to those of Mumbai and Crash, it is evident Edge’s prologue eventually resolves its asynchrony. Nonetheless, the motif of motion conveys open-endedness and at the outset the scene’s place in the narrative is unexplained as are those in Code Unknown and Lantana.

These five films use prologues and four of them re-present them as a coda or repeated scenes later on, which draws attention to modular narrative form. However, Mumbai, Code Unknown, Crash, Lantana and Edge use prologues (and sometimes codas) to convey differing degrees of temporal cohesion. Code Unknown uses asynchrony strongly to show the polyphony of its threads. Lantana uses a less sustained amount of narrative ambiguity which initially suggests asynchrony, but resolves more conclusively than Code Unknown. Edge maintains a degree of narrative openness throughout its prologue and conclusion, sitting in between the asynchrony of Code
*Unknown* and the ultimate “linking…together” of *Lantana* (Bruns 2008, 205). *Crash* and *Mumbai* use their prologues to facilitate thematic and character convergences and synchrony. These differences in the degrees of polyphony and a/synchrony through their differently structured prologues suggests that as yet, their plots cannot be described as a generic element of network films.

Opportunity still remains, however, for the motif of simultaneity to deserve the status of a semantic aspect. In the next section I dig deeper into the question of whether the films’ plots are so different by looking at how they arrange character arcs throughout their plots. This is a key aspect of how network films shape their narrative temporality, leading to the observation that they strongly rely on a theme of simultaneity, which possibly constitutes a semantic element. The representation of time and the ways in which the seven films use simultaneity to shape messages of polyphony and convergence is thus the key focus of the rest of this chapter.

**Time and Character Arcs in Plots**

It has been established that insofar as the term “plots” connotes the broad narrative structure of films, the plot structures of the seven network films are not similar enough to warrant description as a semantic factor. In this section I expand upon the question of whether the films’ plots are actually so different by looking at how they arrange the character arcs throughout their plots. Interestingly, Bordwell observes that the director of *Love Actually* consciously “tried to create ‘ten good beginnings, ten good middles, and ten good ends’” (2008a, 219). Bordwell explains that this approach allows for clarity in order not to confuse viewers. This statement draws my interest further to the question of whether character arcs are structured in ways which generically rely upon simultaneity and narrative order. While I acknowledge the fact that the films’ general structures contrast greatly, this section explores the significant aspect of how network films shape the individual narrative threads so that they might temporally and thematically converge. If indeed they do work similarly to construct parallels in their temporal *syuzhet*, I suggest that this would indicate a generic syntax at play according to Altman’s claim that syntax is the ways “a group of texts organizes those [semantic] building blocks in a similar manner” (1999, 89). I also take the opportunity here to expand on how the films’ plots and depictions of time and polyphony differ. How these films manage temporality and plurality in their juggling of multiple threads is an aspect
which many scholars have appraised as an innovation in film narrative (Berg 2006, 18-19; Bruns 2008, 190, 199; Pisters 2008). Depending on the extents to which these films structurally emphasise simultaneity between threads, this aspect may be described as a significant and possibly generic component of network films.

As discussed in Chapter Four, network films use a range of editing practices to convey connections between characters. These devices help strongly to convey films’ particular treatments of temporality, which scholars have noted. Azcona reflects and expands upon Bordwell’s observation that many contemporary mainstream films use “intensified continuity” (Azcona 2010, 39). Bordwell (2002b) contends that Hollywood films are using more fast paced editing, more wide-angle and deep-focus camera lenses, “[m]ore close framings in dialogue scenes” (16-20), and roving camera movements in order to “to generate a keen moment-by-moment anticipation” and to intensify the classical tradition of narrative continuity (2002b, 24-5). Azcona observes that network films use techniques of match cuts, match compositions in the mise-en-scène, transitional devices such as “trades”, montages, aerial shots that are frequently used in final scenes, and cuts between people performing the same actions and movements in different spaces in order to connect disparate characters (39-45). The use of these editing techniques to convey continuity infers that, despite their very different origins, network films rely strongly on comparable styles which enhance themes of simultaneity. Accordingly this chapter revisits some of the editing practices discussed in Chapter Four to reassess how they influence the films’ portraits of temporality and whether these factors indicate that these films constitute a genre.

Aside from its prologue and coda, Code Unknown proceeds linearly, yet with disruptions to any sense of continuity. Instead of seeking continuity, Code Unknown disrupts narrative flow as between each scene it cuts to a black screen for a few seconds. Frequently the dialogue is cut away from or into in mid-sentence. These cuts to black and non-continuous soundtrack emphasise the sense of isolation and alienation between characters. This audiovisual style fragments the narrative, giving an impression that the film is merely cutting into a duration which precedes and continues beyond our view. Despite Cameron’s observation that Code Unknown ultimately “issues an affirmation of the cinematic long take” (2008, 160-161), even its use of long takes reinforces the sense of temporal fragmentation and asynchrony throughout the film. During long takes at mid to wide distance from the characters, the camera sometimes remains static and at
other times pans along with characters’ movements, but refuses to provide any high angle, wide or establishing shots. These long takes conjoined with limited points of view reinforce a sense of ongoing time which the narrative fragments. John David Rhodes describes this vérité, “real time” camerawork as constructing a seeming arbitrarily ‘seen’ diegesis (2006, 20).

*Code Unknown*’s camerawork emphasises the disparity between fiction and non-fiction, and at the same time insistently reminds us that even the long take’s connotation of “real time” is facetious and that we are watching a constructed narrative. Haneke jarringly contrasts the vérité yet fragmentary camerawork, the stasis of the cuts to black and the stills of Georges’ photos against the continuity editing and emotional manipulation of a scene of a film in which Anne acts. The viewer is emotionally drawn into a scene in which Anne fears for her child’s life, but the scene we are watching abruptly rewinds and Anne (in the process of dubbing the film) laughs (Figure 5.3).

As noted in Chapter Three (104-5), it is revealed that we have been deceived into believing a false image. These disruptions unsettle the viewer and self-reflexively comment on the artificiality of temporal continuity in cinema, emphasising asynchrony. The fragmentation between characters’ threads also undermines the notion of community between characters, which in other films is conveyed by simultaneous or synchronic convergences. Further adding to the temporal ambiguity it is not specified whether the film is set over a few weeks or a few months, although the time in which it
takes Maria to return to Paris after her deportation implies that it takes place over a few months. It is left to the settings, costumes, and posters for the 1999 films *Notting Hill* (Michell) and *Wild Wild West* (Sonnenfeld) in the mise-en-scène to indicate that it is set contemporaneously. This temporal ambiguity unsettles the association of global simultaneity and synchrony with the idea of a global community. Instead, it highlights the incommensurability of characters’ experiences through its temporal fractures.

In terms of *Code Unknown*’s plot structure there is little sense of predictability. Yet its characters do follow a similar pattern of convergence to those in the other six films. Of all the characters Anne appears in the most scenes (fifteen whereas Maria appears in ten, Georges in nine, his father in seven, Amadou in six, and Amadou’s father and mother only in three and two scenes respectively). Although Anne’s scenes are only separated at most by four other characters’ scenes at a time (and at minimum by only one), the order in which the film switches between characters has no fixed pattern. *Code Unknown*’s plot structure, including its symbolic but narratively jarring prologue and coda, deprives the audience of a sense of pleasure (Wheatley 2009, 71), enhancing its theme of the characters’ asynchronous experiences. Importantly, however, the character arcs do move toward shared tension in the final scene. For much of the film the distancing camerawork renders characters’ personal crises mundane, deliberately denying the audience emotional engagement with the characters. Exceptions occur during Anne’s acting scenes and Maria’s confession that she is ashamed of begging, but these scenes also address the question of the fallibility and subjectivity of perception. In these scenes, as throughout the film, the viewer is forced to reflect on their own ethical engagement with the image (Wheatley 2009, 121-123), which renders the characters’ dramatic arcs intellectually rather than emotionally engaging. This lends much of the film a sense of dramatic flatness which, in addition to the randomness of the syuzhet, means that character arcs appear asynchronous. Nevertheless the final scene in which Anne (having just been traumatised on the train) returns home, Amadou and his students drum in public, Maria seeks out a begging spot and Georges is locked out of Anne’s apartment conjoins these characters’ arcs in a thematic motif of futility. Cameron describes this scene as a temporally coherent finale, as

[w]hereas the narrative and visual movements of the film have failed to bring a sense of unity, the staccato movement of the drumming overlaps
spatio-temporal disjunctures. This in turn fosters a sense of community, however abstract or tenuous. (2008, 167)

The film thereby uses its character arcs to emphasise the asynchrony between characters’ experiences, although this convergent moment relates its characters to convey an overall theme. *Code Unknown’d* lack of a sense of temporal or scene order and its attention to polyphony between characters is in contrast to some of the other network films such as *Babel* and *Lantana* which use a more regular and non-polyphonic approach. Yet its shaping of character arcs bears the marks of correlation and shared experience which, as the following discussions show, recur in the other six films.

In stark contrast to *Code Unknown*, *Mumbai* strongly favours narrative synchrony but shares with it character arcs which converge. Beyond its prologue *Mumbai* remains temporally linear. It is given a specific timeline, from the morning of the bombings on 11 July 2006, to a week later at around 6.30pm, the same time the bombings took place (“Scores”). The scene order throughout the film is not regular, but maintains a sense of fluidity and circulation as it tends to return to characters after showing just two or three other threads. The exception to this rule is the poverty stricken character Thomas, who has the least number of scenes, whereas Suresh and Nikhil’s scenes are the most frequent. This screen time inequality contributes to Thomas’ narrative marginalisation, as well as Rupali’s, as established in Chapter Three (88-9, 93).

The connections between characters and their dramatic arcs in *Mumbai* rely strongly on simultaneity. We have already seen in Chapter Four how the characters are related thematically and visually through editing practices such as trades (see 120-1). The combination of character arcs strengthens these connections, simultaneity and narrative linearity. Dramatic high points occur in each character’s respective thread at roughly every three minutes, keeping each individual thread regularly interesting for the viewer. The film’s collective dramatic arc also features high points and low points in general synchrony throughout the film. The bombing (lasting from ~20-26 minutes mark) unites Nikhil, Suresh and Rupali in dramatic moments. Later on (~35.00-45.42 minutes) Rupali, Thomas, Patil and Suresh each have tense moments in a short space of time. These simultaneous emotional high points between the characters unite them and thereby convey narrative synchrony. Another tense period correlates Suresh and Nikhil,
when scenes of Suresh and his friend chasing the Muslim man on a motorbike are intercut with a scene in which Nikhil calls police attention (including Patil’s) to an abandoned motorbike which he fears holds a bomb. This intercutting and simultaneity thematically stresses both characters’ paranoia and structurally gives cohesion to the multiple threads. Another temporal convergence occurs when during one night characters experience nightmare situations, literally and emotionally (Nikhil dreams his wife dies in an explosion, Rupali agrees to talk about her loss, and Kadam’s suicide attempt shocks Patil). Similarly, in the last ten minutes of the film of the film each character experiences self-realisations. In this scene the characters’ threads become merged “with an authorial worldview” (Bruns 2008, 190), conveying a non-polyphonic, monologic theme. To a much more extreme degree than Code Unknown, Mumbai’s structural convergences of the threads’ separate dramatic moments strongly correlate and consolidate the film’s dramatic arc. In doing so, Mumbai sustains a synchronic form and foregoes polyphony despite its claims to pluralism. Despite these differences, it is clear that both films rely on simultaneity to convey their characters’ connections and relationship to the notion of network community. This sustains the possibility that the use of simultaneity in network films may be a syntactic ploy.

*Crash* also strongly favours temporal synchrony and, to a greater extent than Mumbai, uses convergent narrative arcs to assure audiences of characters’ fateful and communal connectivity. The past tense of the prologue’s intertitle infers a linear progression to the narrative’s present moment, and *Crash* indeed proceeds to linearly show the events leading up to and beyond Grahame’s recognition of his brother Peter’s body. A strong sense of synchrony and simultaneity is constructed through numerous match cuts and sound bridges between scenes, and each of the threads proceed linearly. Whereas Mumbai introduces its five storylines upfront in the first few minutes of the film, Crash introduces its characters gradually, partially reminiscent of a “daisy chain plot” which passes linearly from one character to the next (Berg 2006, 24-5). For instance, we first see Daniel the locksmith from a distance in Rick and Jean’s house, then a few scenes later Daniel’s storyline is developed in a scene showing him caring for his daughter. His initial appearance in Rick and Jean’s house provides an introduction to him rather than a chance encounter between already established characters. But later when Daniel changes Farhad’s lock, and since we have already been introduced to Farhad and Daniel separately this encounter appears as a significant coincidental connection. Similar introductions to characters and later significant
convergences between characters who have already been introduced occur throughout the film. This provides viewers a clearly comprehensible, linear plot which emphasises synchrony.

*Crash’s* character arcs also converge and relate to one another synchronously and monologically. Individually the characters’ arcs feature peaks regularly at roughly every two to three minutes, with major dramas occurring two or three scenes before their threads’ respective conclusions. Overall the characters’ peaks strongly follow one another throughout the film, with regular moments of tension occurring every five minutes until the one hour mark when climaxes in ten characters’ threads occur over the ensuing half hour. Similarly, the last twenty minutes shows these characters’ dénouements before the final scene which presents an aerial zoom out implying future convergences between people. A strong sense of simultaneity and convergence is thus created throughout the film and the plot maintains a strong temporal synchrony while subsuming the threads’ and theme’s potential polyphony into a “coming together” and resolution of characters’ threads (Bruns 2008, 205). *Crash* therefore bears much in common with *Mumbai*’s synchronic treatment of character convergences. Altogether it appears that in *Code Unknown*, *Mumbai*, and *Crash*, simultaneity plays a fundamental, possibly generic role in constructing the theme of network community.

After its opening scene *Lantana* is generally linear and causally based, as are *Crash* and *Mumbai*. It takes place over at least eight, possibly nine days separated by seven nights that we are shown. However, it is unclear whether the first few days of these are consecutive, since in that time Valerie has three different counselling sessions with her client Patrick. Granted that sessions would most likely be weekly rather than daily, this suggests that these scenes spread over possibly three weeks. However, in the latter three days and two nights evident, it is more probable that they are consecutive between the time Jane sees the news report about Valerie’s disappearance and when she reports Nik. The roughly defined timeline thus conveys some temporal ambiguity, as does the prologue. Yet in contrast to *Code Unknown*, continuity editing is favoured in *Lantana* more so than jarring juxtapositions. Similar to *Crash*, in *Lantana* characters are introduced gradually via other characters as, for instance, after initially meeting Leon and Jane we next meet Leon’s wife Sonya via a scene with Leon, then Valerie via an appearance with Sonya. These gradual introductions aid the general sense of linearity in contrast to *Code Unknown*’s unsettling juxtapositions and interruptions. Foreshadowing
actions are present throughout the mise-en-scène, as for example Nik and Paula’s children are shown within the lantana bushes burying something just as later Nik tries to hide the evidence of Valerie’s shoe. These scenes create suspense surrounding Valerie’s death, prompting viewers to understand that all the characters’ lives revolve around Valerie’s death. Elsewhere the film sets up questions of whether or not, and if so with whom Leon, John and Patrick (and possibly Nik) are having sexual affairs. Although characters are left in different emotional states, these links and focus on continuity lends *Lantana* a sense of cohesion and synchrony, more like *Crash* and *Mumbai* than *Code Unknown*. Yet the use of simultaneity in character convergences to convey network community suggests that these films apply a generic syntax.

Despite its strong use of convergence, some degree of asynchrony is present in *Lantana*. Technological asynchrony becomes a facet of its thriller plot and creates suspense about the future of Leon and Sonya’s marriage. When Valerie is stranded on the road late at night she calls her husband from a payphone. The screen fades to black then fades up to a shot of the answering machine at their home recording her messages. No one picks up the phone and we are led to believe John is not home (and is possibly having an affair). Fades to black (reminiscent of the fade to black between the prologue and the film’s main narrative) occur in between shots of Valerie waiting and calling John, then later when her body is discovered and at the beginning of Nik’s interrogation. Akin to *Code Unknown*’s cuts to black, these fades to black signal temporal pauses and elisions in the narrative. It is not until Nik’s confession that we discover in flashbacks how Valerie died. John’s subsequent admission that he actually was at home when Valerie called further extends this asynchrony, as in a flashback we once more hear Valerie on the answering machine. Heard again, Valerie’s voice resurrects the themes of distrust, the question of whether anyone is to blame for her death, and uncertainty about whether love can sustain troubled relationships.

A similar ambiguity hangs over *Lantana* in the form of the tape from Sonya and Valerie’s counselling session, although the asynchrony surrounding the tape is eventually rendered synchronous. During the session Valerie asks Sonya if she still loves Leon. Sonja reflects wordlessly on this question, and without revealing her answer, the film cuts to the next scene, showing John in an alleyway, ignoring a call from Valerie. This cut suggests John is having an affair, as is Sonya’s husband. The cut also debatably suggests that John and Sonya’s husband are having an affair together. After
Leon discovers the tape at Valerie’s office he listens to it while sitting in his car, but stops it at Sonya’s pause. This renewed moment of suspense underlines their marriage’s state of uncertainty and deception. The answer is not revealed until after the investigation is solved. Directly after talking with John, Leon listens to the tape and we discover that Sonja answers “Yeah, I still love him”. This affirmation is only partially a point of relief, as Leon sobs out of regret and guilt. It is evident the future strength of their marriage remains uncertain, as the final scene of them dancing infers (see Chapter Three 94-5). Nevertheless the tape is ultimately made to answer in synchrony with the narrative and character arcs, creating a catharsis in preparation for narrative closure.

*Lantana* does depict the characters’ experiential disjunctions, but its linear and synchronous plot drives the narrative towards a monological theme. Similar to *Mumbai*, characters experience dramatic high and low points at roughly the same times in their respective threads, at around every three to five minutes. In relation to the film’s overall dramatic arc these peaks and troughs regularly occur at roughly ten minute intervals. The final montage unites the majority of characters’ suffering with a generalised question about the future and the possibility of love and trust in contemporary society. The narrative therefore resumes and reinstates its synchronous and linear direction, having revealed the state of characters’ relationships, and having exposed the truth behind the mysteries at hand. *Lantana* thereby appears much like *Crash* and *Mumbai* in its use of narrative synchrony, although its disjunctures and ambiguity surrounding characters’ futures are akin to those of *Code Unknown*’s. *Lantana* manages to some degree to maintain polyphony in its characters’ divergent voices at the end, but to a larger degree renders polyphony subservient to the narrative hierarchy which privileges Leon’s centrality and marginalises other figures (see Chapters Three and Four). *Lantana* therefore relies strongly on a sense of “linking…together” (Bruns 2008, 205). Even though its final scenes show characters in different emotional states, dissolves are used to link them. Visually and temporally these dissolves infer the characters’ experiences blend together in a closely knit web. Once again, while in some regards it recalls *Code Unknown*, *Lantana*’s use of synchrony ultimately resembles that in *Mumbai* and *Crash*.

Despite the fact that *Edge* is a triptych and does not intercut between narrative threads as do *Babel*, *Crash*, *Lantana* and *Mumbai*, it does contain distinct temporal and visual links between its narrative threads which conveys simultaneity. This creates a sense of temporal, character and narrative progression as opposed to the multiplication
of parallels and closure provided in *Crash* and *Babel*. *Edge*’s three main timelines each have different time spans but intersect at roughly regular points. Unlike *Code Unknown*, although *Edge* shows characters’ experiential differences, it stresses their mounting convergences, emphasising an affirmation of network community. A strong sense of similarity is drawn between the character arcs, which stresses characters’ synchronies. In particular the intertitles “Yeter’s Death” and “Lotte’s Death” forewarn the audience of these characters’ deaths, and both similarly die towards the end of these two roughly forty-minute segments. Moreover, in the final roughly twenty minute segment we see the remaining characters each come to points of self-realisation, presenting an emotional synchrony in their arcs. Nejat realises he wants to forgive Ali, we see Ali with tears in his eyes when finishing the book Nejat gave him, Ayten apologises to Susanne for Lotte’s death, and Susanne forgives and befriends Ayten. These turning points occur in close succession, conveying dramatic synchrony. *Edge* thus presents its character arcs as synchronous and simultaneous.

*Edge*’s temporal complexity draws attention to the differences between characters’ experiences, but also ultimately unites the characters in a form of network community. On the whole, it seems as though the film’s *fabula* spans a few months, beginning on the 1st of May and ending possibly during September. \(^{31}\) The first segment “Yeter’s Death” begins on May 1st in Bremen. It leaves off after we see Nejat establish himself in the bookstore in Istanbul after Yeter’s death and his father’s imprisonment. The final shots of this segment show him travelling through Turkey. These shots presumably preface the sequence featured in the film’s prologue, thus signalling a jump into the future beyond the point where the narrative of “Yeter’s Death” ends. The second segment, “Lotte’s Death”, backtracks in time from the first segment’s end to also start on May 1st, this time in Istanbul. While the first and second segments start at the same point, however, “Lotte’s Death” ends at a later point in time to that of “Yeter’s death” (not including the shots of Nejat driving). The third segment “The Edge of Heaven” carries on from the end point of “Lotte’s Death”. In carrying on from the end of the second segment and eventually explaining the prologue and bridging scene of the

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\(^{31}\) I am postulating this since Nejat tells Susanne towards the end of the film that it is “Bayram”, a Turkic term for holiday. This particular holiday could be the *Eid ul-Fitr* – the end of Ramadan which falls around the end of August, early September. Given that Ali serves a prison sentence most likely for accidental manslaughter, that at the end of the film we see him freed, and that Ayten’s trial in Germany and prison sentence in Turkey would take a period of months, this also would seem to spread the film’s timeline over at least a few months if not possibly longer than a year.
first segment, the third segment regains a sense of narrative progression. Its intertitle also infers that this segment will explain the film’s titular and thus principal message, providing a sense of inevitable closure and gravity. When the prologue’s scene replays, this time (as noted earlier) with a more recent cover of Kâzım Koyuncu’s song *Ben Seni Sevduğumu* by the female singer Şevval Sam played loudly on the soundtrack rather than faintly in the diegesis, the intensity of this music helps to emphasise the sense that time and the narrative are now moving forward into the future. In this way *Edge*’s narrative puts down temporal anchors. Thus, although *Edge* is structurally very different to *Code Unknown*, *Mumbai*, *Crash*, and *Lantana*, it relies heavily on narrative simultaneity to convey its theme of network community. Again this indicates that this aspect probably qualifies as a generic syntactic marker. Overall, *Edge* presents its characters as experientially related and thus synchronous, but simultaneously it leaves their threads open-ended, signalling an ongoing temporal and experiential complexity and polyphony.

The timeline of *Love* creates parallels between its characters in order to emphasise their connections and convey a sense of synchronic network community rather than question time or their experiential disconnections. *Love* shares with *Edge* a triptych structure in which the three parts begin at different points in time, yet intersect. *Love*’s character arcs also climax and resolve in similar fashions which convey narrative synchrony. Each of the characters moves from contentment in their early scenes to discontent and uncertainty during their polygamous relationships in the mid points and resolve with liberation in the final few minutes of their segments. The timelines of the three segments are not specified, although regularity is established in that each segment lasts for roughly forty minutes. The occurrence of the Aceh tsunami indicates a specific date (26 December 2004), around which the viewer can estimate where the segments coincide. *Love*’s first segment spans two points in time, beginning when Salma’s son Nadim is a child and cutting to ten years later when he is a young adult. Pak Hajji’s heart attack occurs on the day of the tsunami and the end of the segment is unspecified. The second segment begins a few months before the tsunami and ends soon after it, seemingly a few days, although it may be longer. The final segment’s timeline is unclear as to whether it spans a few weeks or months. Given the degree to which Koh Abun and Ming’s relationship progresses the section most likely spans a few months, with the tsunami happening around the middle. Siti and Ming’s segments conclude at the same moment in time as they exchange the taxi ride, and Salma’s segment concludes at the point when she attends to Siti at the clinic, which falls in the last few
weeks of Siti’s segment. The positioning of the tsunami in roughly the midpoint of each segment and the fact that the latter two segments conclude at the same point in time anchor a more circular pattern than that of *Edge*. *Love* does not deeply question or draw attention to the nature of time and the experience of time as *Code Unknown* does. Despite these contrasts in narrative politics and structure, however, *Love*, like the films so far discussed, once more illustrates that simultaneity is a key and likely generic factor to the construction of network community in network films.

Cameron mentions *Babel* when he argues that although multiple protagonist films such as *Magnolia* and *Syriana* (and from the seven films here we could add *Crash*, *Lantana* and *Mumbai*) “create dense networks of relationships among characters, events and locations … [they] do not pursue a modular temporal structure” (2008, 24). Cameron states that *Babel* is an exception to this case, since it allows its viewers to assume that its network of globally connected tales is unfolding in a linear temporal mode, until a phone call near the end of the film reveals that the separate plot lines are not contemporaneous. (24)

In Cameron’s view *Babel* is a modular narrative because it foregrounds its temporal structure via the depiction of an asynchronic phone call. The sequences of narrative threads in *Babel* are initially disjointed in relation to each other as they do not begin and end at the same points in time. However, *Babel*’s four narrative threads individually follow a linear direction, with only one thread commencing significantly later in the *fabula* than the other three which ultimately creates a sense of circularity. The two threads concerning the Moroccan boys and Richard and Susan start roughly (possibly exactly) at the same time as each other. Chieko’s sequence presumably starts later on than these two, since she sees news reports of Yussef’s arrest before we see the police capturing him in the Moroccan thread. Likewise, Amelia’s sequence begins when Richard makes the phone call to her from the hospital in Casablanca after his and Susan’s ordeal. This lag is the key to the film’s jumbled timeline. Early in the film we see Amelia’s side of the phone call, but it is not until the end that we see Richard’s side of it, prompting us to realise that the film’s timelines have appeared out of synchrony with each other. This means that Amelia’s thread’s place in the *syuzhet* conveys an element of circularity, since the film’s later moments become linked back to its early ones. As such, this conveys a type of asynchrony.
However, *Babel* works in other ways to retain a strong sense of linearity and non-polyphony. Cameron does not discuss *Babel* further than the quote given above, but similar to his remarks on *Timecode* it is clear that while a film may contain elements of asynchrony, this does not necessarily mean that it maintains a polyphonic function throughout its course (see Chapter Two 70-72). *Babel* conveys a strongly linear structure in which characters’ voices are subsumed to a monologic theme. One main contributor to the film’s reassurance of linearity is the fact that it conveys a clear causal logic. It is possible to conjecture that the total time of the characters’ timelines spans roughly a week to two weeks, set contemporaneously to filming in 2005. The Moroccan boys’ and Richard and Susan’s narratives maintain a clear cause and effect pattern. For instance, first we see the sequence in which the boys shoot the bus. Then, after a sequence featuring Amelia (linked by a match cut), the effects of the gunshot upon Richard and Susan are shown. The order of the sequences is in fact mostly uniform, moving consistently between the Moroccan boys, Amelia, Richard and Susan, and lastly Chieko. There is only one alteration to this familiar four-times-repeated pattern at the end of the film (Kerr 2010, 42). We see Amelia being deported, then instead of cutting to Richard and Susan as usual, the film cuts to Yussef comprehending his brother’s death, before cutting to Richard’s phone call to Amelia, and finally resuming the pattern through Chieko’s reconciliation with her father. The alteration means that the film’s timeline reveals the underpinning logic behind the jumble, as we see Richard’s side of the phone call which connects to Amelia’s first sequence.

This alteration also brings catharsis as it places Amelia’s and the Moroccan boys’ tragic conclusions before the two ultimately reassuring threads. Thanks to the narrative’s temporal lag, here the audience already knows that Richard and Susan’s children will survive. This creates an understanding of the characters’ asynchronous experiences as in fact linear and convergent, balancing out the threads in terms of narrative affect rather than conveying polyphony. Concern over Chieko, Richard and Susan’s future is resolved, while sorrow for Amelia’s deportation lingers, and pity for the Moroccan family is encouraged (see Chapter Three 86-7). The same piece of music bridges between each of these four scenes, constructing a move towards resolution, catharsis and containment. This narrative execution compromises a sense of polyphony. Here the “four corners” of the world as symbolised in the four threads fall into a well-established orientalist pattern of Westernised security and othered suffering. Similar to *Crash*’s conclusion, *Babel* ends with a zoom out over the cityscape of Japan which
inferred the overwhelming number of other stories in existence and suggests that stories such as these will continue to occur ad infinitum. The film’s general sense of catharsis, its explicitly interwoven threads and the clear linearity of each storyline reinstates a sense of cohesion and synchrony, undermining the initial potential for polyphony. Thus, as in each of the case studies discussed, Babel keenly relies on simultaneity in order to construct its theme of network community. While its narrative politics differ to those of Code Unknown and Edge and more closely resemble those of Crash and Mumbai and to a lesser extent Love and Lantana, Babel evidently addresses simultaneity in comparable, arguably generic ways to these various films.

The seven films use markedly different plot structures and varying degrees of narrative synchrony, asynchrony and polyphony. These contrasts between the films cast doubt on the extent to which they can be labelled a genre, since plot structures are key aspects of genre films. This section has provided a comparison of how the films present the motifs of a/synchrony and polyphony, with the conclusion that Code Unknown features these aspects most strongly, with Lantana and Edge in its wake, heading toward a more linear and convergent pole respectively in Love, Babel, Crash and Mumbai. Despite these differences, it remains that these plot structures result in the theme of simultaneity through character arcs’ convergences, which are possibly semantic and syntactic elements.

**The Temporality of Convergences and Encounters**

This section explores the aspects of temporality and polyphony in regards to the motif of character encounters in the seven case studies. One of the defining points of network films so far established is that they depict encounters between strangers (see Chapter One 17). However, the extent to which these scenes describe a/synchrony and polyphony differs between the films. This section discusses whether the aspect of simultaneity in character encounters is treated consistently enough to warrant the genre label for this wide selection of films.

**Code Unknown** begins with an encounter between Amadou, Jean, Anne and Maria, but soon turns its attention to how these characters are dispersed from one another rather than convergent. **Code Unknown** maintains an asynchronous narrative as it stresses characters’ divergences and experiential differences despite their convergences
in time and space. After its prologue, it is possible to believe that the opening scene of the film’s body sets up a viewer expectation that these characters will interact later in the film. Cameron perceives this when he writes “The film begins by implying that it will…undertake an exploration of interconnected stories within an urban environment” (2008, 153). However, the film’s temporal arrangement and its visual framing using long takes and mid-shots present the characters’ interactions as rare and simply coincidental. Besides three long key scenes which last up to eight minutes the scenes average at two to three minutes each, which is a fairly long time compared to the other six considered here. Encounters between the network characters who are strangers to one another are few and far between throughout *Code Unknown*. In fact, beyond the first violent encounter between Anne, Amadou, Maria and Jean, there is only one encounter of proximity between the network characters.

Instead of the overtones of creating order out of chaos with increasing character convergences which other films such as *Crash, Babel* and *Lantana* provide, *Code Unknown* does not create narrative climaxes in characters’ encounters. Cameron writes that the film’s “ episodic structure undermines temporal and causal connections”, and that “the film frustrates any attempts to draw closer connections among these characters” (2008, 149). After the first encounter between Anne, Amadou, Maria and Jean, it is not until over forty minutes later that Amadou appears at the same restaurant as Anne and Georges. Up to this point we have been watching Anne and Georges dine with their friends for about two minutes. When Amadou and his girlfriend pass Anne and Georges’ table, instead of providing a wide shot to emphasise the characters’ proximity to each other, the camera simply tracks with Amadou and his girlfriend to their own table (Figure 5.4). We stay with Amadou for roughly four minutes, until behind them Anne walks past and the camera tracks back with her to her table (Figure 5.5).
Anne has noticed Amadou and once she is seated again points him out to Georges, but the scene cuts to black before we see whether they confront Amadou or not. Apart from the opening scene after the prologue, this scene is the only encounter between network characters in this film, in contrast to the numerous encounters between strangers staged in other network films such as Crash and Mumbai. In this restaurant scene the characters appear in proximity to each other, but the two moments of passing each other are brief. The camera movements which focus on and thereby individuate the characters create a sense of experiential divergence which undercuts their spatial convergence. This scene thematically highlights the experiential differences of Anne and Georges’ bourgeois conversation with their friends and Amadou’s story of the struggle his grandfather faced as an immigrant. Asynchrony is similarly created throughout Code Unknown, emphasising the differences between characters and constantly questioning the possibility of whether these network characters can be described as a community. The film thereby succeeds in conveying a polyphonic, pluralistic narrative, even during its character encounters. Nevertheless, these character encounters place emphasis on the simultaneity at hand in order to raise these questions. This bears similarity to the other case studies, as I describe shortly.

In contrast to Code Unknown’s divergences, Mumbai’s use of chance convergences between characters reinforces a sense of network community. Its points of convergence are less frequent than in Crash, Edge and Lantana. As noted earlier (Chapter Four 120-1), its opening trades and the montage of characters accompanied by a song halfway through the film emphasise the simultaneity of the characters’ emotional states and their temporal proximity to one another despite the fact they live in different parts of the city. There are eight points of temporal and physical convergence between characters in the film, including two montages: the first song montage and the second being the montage during Patil’s speech near the end of the film (see Chapter Four 121-2). These montages and the remaining scenes in which characters appear in proximity to one another occur regularly throughout the film, at approximately every twenty minutes, then more frequently in the last twenty minutes of the film.32 The regularity of these convergences and the fact that they occur between different characters underscores the

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32 They occur at the twenty two minutes, thirty nine minutes, one hour and eight minutes, one hour and forty one minutes, one hour and fifty six minutes, one hour and fifty eight minutes, two hours and ten minutes, and two hours and twelve minutes marks.
film’s dedication to a linear and synchronous narrative. 

Mumbai’s temporal synchrony works to narratively resolve the social problems it initially raised and reassures audiences of communal connections between characters. Characters’ connections and individual trajectories ultimately move toward resolutions and a patriotic sentiment. This is unlike the asynchrony and questioning of the possibility of community which Code Unknown enacts. However, encounters in both films stress the characters’ experiences of simultaneity and prompts viewers to see them as linked, however contrastingly. This may indicate a generic use of simultaneity in character encounters.

Crash’s plentiful encounters are cumulative, in effect allowing the viewer to gradually understand the connections rather than presenting an overwhelming amount of characters in the first few scenes as Mumbai does. Crash uses match cuts and sound bridges in order to heighten narrative continuity and allow the viewer to easily observe connections and the simultaneity between the many threads, thereby offsetting the viewer’s possible confusion between its many stories. There are eight of these types of scenes in which network characters directly encounter one another, and seven of these scenes occur predominantly in the last fifty minutes of this roughly one hour and fifty minute film. Three of these later encounters are between characters who have met earlier in the film. For instance, the first time we meet Cameron and Christine is when Tom and John pull them over and John molests Christine. In the latter part of the film John and Christine share a scene together as do Cameron and Tom. These chance re-encounters lends a strong element of symmetry to the film, allowing the encounters to redeem and re-balance the characters’ transgressions and failures (as discussed in Chapter Three).

The heavy distribution of character encounters within the last half of Crash and the symmetry of some of them means that the film provides a keen synchronous drive towards narrative resolution. The pathos-filled music which accompanies these scenes further upgrades the element of chance to an atmosphere of fate that is conveyed in these encounters. The lyrics of the final non-diegetic pop rock song “Maybe Tomorrow” performed by Stereophonics (2003) intone “So maybe tomorrow, I’ll find my way home.” Complementing the way the characters’ encounters have been arranged to offset each others’ anger and offer each other opportunities for redemption, these lyrics offer the hope that despite the violence there is comforting closure waiting ahead. This closure encourages optimism, as the trajectory of events implies everyone shares equal
experiences and are redeemed via this commonality. Crash thereby mitigates the realistic critique of racism and prejudice it purported to engage. Crash’s temporal scheme ingrains the narrative with a sense of inevitable resolution so that even though its final zoom out suggests open-endedness, the narrative implicitly reinstates a sense of closure through its inference of further character connections beyond its frame. The film’s synchronous and generally linear progression draws together and synthesises characters’ experiences. Despite their differences regarding polyphony, as do Code Unknown and Mumbai, Crash also draws attention to simultaneity in order to comparatively convey characters’ experiences during their encounters. This lends weight to the claim that such an element is a generic syntactic quality.

The character connections throughout Lantana do not provide a sense of fate as do those in Crash, but instead appear circumstantial, thanks in part to the film’s strong spatial anchors as discussed in the next chapter. Connections between characters are clearly introduced, similar to Crash’s approach to depicting character connections. Whereas the films discussed above place a strong emphasis on the connections between characters who do not know one another well, in Lantana most of the central network characters meet one another and become acquaintances, friends or lovers. There are only three instances in which characters who do not know one another intersect. The first is Leon’s collision with the jogger twenty two minutes into the film, and the other two are the successive scenes of Valerie bumping into Pete and Pete talking with Leon at the pub, situated around the film’s forty two minute mark. These relatively rare encounters between strangers whom we know to be connected emphasise a theme of chance, without drawing heavily on the theme of fate as does Crash with its multitude of connections between strangers. However, the tightly knit group of network characters and their connections throughout Lantana contribute to its sense of linearity and lack of ambiguity surrounding how the characters connect.

Other points of synchrony are evident in Lantana as, for instance, when a montage shows the characters all watching the same news report about Valerie’s disappearance. This montage shows Nik and Paula, Sonja, and Jane in their respective living rooms all watching the same ABC news report about Valerie’s disappearance. It occurs at the midpoint of the film and is the film’s only montage aside from the concluding scenes. This pivotal scene brings the up-until-now vaguely related characters into temporal synchrony and closer conceptual proximity via Valerie’s
disappearance. The characters each have either direct or indirect connections to Valerie. Sonja knew her, and Jane along with the audience suspects Nik of some misdeed after having seen him throw a woman’s shoe into the bushes late one night. The fact that they are all watching the same report at the same time (delivered by the nationally recognised Australian reporter Richard Morecroft) rather than through separately broadcast reports, underscores their synchronic as well as personal connections with one another. An element of suspense leads us even more strongly to suspect that the different narrative threads will significantly converge, as eventually they do at various points. In contrast to the function of the media link to signal asynchronic convergences in Babel, Lantana’s media link of the news report signifies the characters’ synchronic convergences. Through this montage we can see that Lantana neatly links its characters, favouring narrative transparency rather than ambiguity. While its tendency towards synchrony places it in close relation to Crash and Mumbai, Lantana also shares with these and Code Unknown a vital focus on simultaneity during character encounters in order to compare characters’ shared and differing experiences. This strengthens the proposition that simultaneity in character encounters is treated generically as a semantic and syntactic quality amongst network films.

Whereas in the above films characters may not realise their connections when they appear in proximity to one another, in Edge missed connections occur between characters who are deliberately searching for one another. A form of asynchrony is prevalent in this “missed connection” motif. Missed connections highlight for the viewer the potential pervasiveness of connections. Throughout the film characters who share common relationships come into close proximity to one another, or face an opportunity to discover the connection, but do not realise it. For instance, at the Atatürk airport Susanne and Ali stand next to one another without realising it; when searching Bremen for Ayten’s mother Yeter, Ayten and Lotte unsuspectingly pass the train in which Yeter and Nejat sit; Lotte tells Nejat she is searching for “Gül”, Ayten’s alias, when they are both searching for Ayten; and Lotte puts up a notice on the board next to Nejat’s poster of Yeter (Figure 5.6). The fact that Lotte looks at but does not recognise Yeter mirrors the fact that (on screen) Yeter does not happen to tell Nejat her daughter’s name. Although they are both looking for the same people (Nejat actively, Lotte via Ayten’s own search), they cannot find them.
These “if only” moments, when we but not the characters are privy to the potential resolution of their problems and fulfilment of the puzzle pieces, are tantalisingly left dangling right up to and beyond the last frame. They form open brackets (will Nejat and his father reunite? Will Nejat ever meet Ayten and realise she is Yeter’s daughter?), which open out onto others while denying us a sense of predictable closure. While characters fail to grasp their temporal and spatial unity with the people whom they are searching for, these missed connections allow for a new sense of Turkish German community to be explored, evident in the friendship between Susanne and Ayten, and Nejat’s hope for reconciliation with Ali. *Edge* uses these missed connections and the atrophy of Yeter and Lotte’s threads to maintain a degree of polyphony even while it focuses on encounters between characters. Much like *Code Unknown* in its articulation of different themes and the abrupt divergences of characters’ directions, but more akin to *Mumbai* in the positivity found between characters’ encounters, *Edge* maintains a polyphonic open-endedness more than an “authorial worldview” (Bruns 2008, 190). The prevalence of simultaneous encounters as a means of conveying characters’ connectedness and comparing their experiences lends further weight to the likelihood that this is a generic factor.

Character encounters in *Love* are used to compare the narratives in terms of their themes rather than question their temporality. When the women meet and help one another, the separate segments in which they are shown accentuates their individual experiences. *Love* spreads its six moments of connection evenly throughout its duration.
Each of the central characters connect with the others, first at the midpoint of their segments and then at the end of their segments. These become repeated scenes in the second and third segments and, as with the prologue in *Edge*, accrue meaning as the viewer pieces together the puzzle. A type of symmetry akin to that in *Crash* is present in the permutations of encounters, as Salma first meets Ming then Siti, Siti first meets Salma then Ming, and Ming first meets Salma then Siti, closing the circle. Whereas *Edge* maintained a sense of narrative progression and anchorage in following the journey of Nejat throughout the film, *Love*’s three sections are more loosely connected and do not reconnect all its characters in the film’s final moments as do the other films analysed above. Interestingly, at the end of Ming’s segment we are reminded once again of Siti’s story, but not of Salma’s. Although their stories each roughly last for forty minutes, by the end of the film Salma’s segment has possibly faded in some viewers’ memories. *Love*’s temporal scheme is eventually rendered synchronous as in some of the other films, yet its connections between characters are more coincidental than fatefully convergent. Once more simultaneity in character encounters is used to draw comparisons and relationships between characters, signifying a likely generic quality in conjunction with the five other films so far discussed.

Unlike the other six films, we do not see *Babel*’s network characters converge physically. However, as discussed in Chapter Four (123), media links and editing practices connect the four threads in a manner which strongly conveys simultaneity between the threads. As noted earlier (161-2), *Babel*’s plot eventually resolves to connect the characters along a coherent timeline with clear causal relationships. In terms of correlation between characters’ threads, *Babel* strongly creates narrative synchrony, recalling the methods of *Crash* and *Mumbai*. Similar to *Mumbai* and *Lantana*, *Babel*’s individual threads respectively feature regular intervals of dramatic tension, at roughly every five minutes, each peaking at around its twenty to twenty-three minute point. Overall this contributes to a narrative arc in which the characters’ separate dramatic high points converge, gradually building up and peaking between the 1.10-1.48 hour mark before all calming down up until the film’s conclusion at roughly 2.10 minutes. *Babel*’s combination of narrative threads thus problematise Cameron’s earlier noted claim that *Babel* conveys asynchrony (2008, 24), while the “coming together” of its narrative threads undermines its attempts to convey polyphony. Although *Babel*’s network characters do not directly encounter one another, its narrative conveys a strong sense of simultaneity in order to contrast and connect characters’ threads, as do the
other six case studies. It can therefore be claimed that this aspect is apparently a generic syntax, according to its prevalence in this wide range of films.

Although there is much difference in the degree to which the case studies depict polyphony and asynchrony, with *Code Unknown* providing the clearest example of both aspects (followed on a sliding scale by *Lantana* and *Edge*) and *Mumbai* providing the least (preceded by *Crash, Babel and Love*), all of these films use comparable devices of simultaneity and convergence in their plots. While using such devices to different thematic ends and conveying various narrative politics, it is clear that the thematic aspect of simultaneity is a recurrent semantic element and simultaneity in the films’ plots is structured syntactically to support the theme of network community. These conjoined aspects of temporality in the seven films indicate that they can be considered a genre.

**Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed the ways in which the seven films use and depict time in service to their construction of connections between network characters and the theme of network community. The seven films use varied plots, ranging from jumbled timelines to linear ones, and the degrees to which they portray linearity, simultaneity, and disjointed times contrast. Thus, it seems unlikely that their temporal plot structures are generic.

Nevertheless, the seven films do share temporal themes and motifs. As well as being set contemporaneously, they place a strong focus on simultaneity and convergences. Understandably, the extents to which the films manage the motif of simultaneity differ. Whereas some of the seven case studies maintain a sense of asynchrony and narrative ambiguity and therefore render their social portraits and narrative politics complex, others end up portraying synchronous time so that narrative and political complexity is somewhat mitigated or swept aside.

Although the films demonstrate varied approaches to representing broad plot structures, polyphony, and a/synchrony, it is clear that simultaneity is a recurrent semantic topic while plot simultaneity is structured syntactically. These crucial aspects of temporality in the seven network films indicate that network films can be considered
a genre. The following chapter focuses on the spatial implications of the films’ treatments of character relationships and convergences in order to move further towards a conclusion on whether network films can be considered a genre.
Chapter Six: Mapping Space

Throughout this chapter I discuss whether the seven films’ spatial settings may be considered generic aspects in keeping with Rick Altman’s recognition that settings often help viewers to identify particular genres (1984, 10-11). Although not all films in all genres use consistent settings (for example, musicals can be set anywhere), in regard to network films this aspect proves useful to discuss the extent to which the films can be called a genre. All of the seven case studies are set within iconic cities. It is telling of this trait that city names and spatial descriptions feature frequently in network film titles, such as *Sidewalks of New York* (Burns 2001), *Paris* (Klapisch 2008), *Short Cuts*, *Adrift in Manhattan* (De Villa 2007), *Chelsea Walls* (Hawke 2001) and *The Yacoubian Building* (Hamed 2006). In the first brief section of this chapter I contend that these types of settings are a generic semantic element in network films. In the following section I examine how the seven case studies blur the boundaries of public and private spaces, possibly syntactically in service to the theme of network community. The third section explores the spatialisation of network community formed in character encounters. Finally the fourth section considers the closing scenes of network films, comparing their degrees of closure and analysing attendant spatial relationships. These films use particular domestic, public and natural spaces in similar ways, suggesting that these spaces might function generically to enhance the theme of network community.

Scholarship has drawn attention to how network films distinctively use and portray space. María del Mar Azcona has discussed the ways in which space is used in the particular films she analyses (49). Yet since this thesis addresses different films and categorises network films differently to Azcona (as defined in Chapter One 33), it is necessary to analyse how space is used specifically in the seven case studies. David Bordwell notes some of the types of spaces in which network films connect characters. These include most popularly “a city or a neighbourhood”, “[s]ingle buildings”, and “hotels, apartment houses, cafés, and the like” which “put protagonists within hailing distance” (2008a, 203). He insightfully writes that often “the city-based plot aims at overcoming urban alienation” (213). But Bordwell does not go into detail about the ways in which these spaces compare and politicise the characters and their socio-economic inequalities. Addressing this gap, this chapter analyses the seven films’ political uses of space.
Some authors have noted that Fredric Jameson’s idea of “cognitive mapping” (1991, 51) can be applied to network films (Hsu 2006, 134-43; Shaw 2011, 25). In response to apparently limitless diversity and drawing on Kevin Lynch’s idea of the legibility of cities (Lynch 1960, 2), Jameson envisages “cognitive mapping” as a representational tool for the postmodern sublime (1991, 38). Resembling conspiracy theories, “cognitive mapping” is an attempt “to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system”, an attempt to grasp an understanding of its interconnections and of the individual’s place in the world (38). As an answer to postmodernity’s fragmentation and schizophrenia, he calls for “[a]n aesthetic of cognitive mapping – a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system” (54). Cognitive mapping is thus a way of understanding the world as a whole system. Concepts of globalisation, internet communities, network society and chaos theory can be viewed as conjoint expressions of this paradigm, each making order from what was previously seen as chaotic (Bordwell 2008a, 197-8). Hsuan L. Hsu (2006) claims that network films such as *Crash* respond to this paradigm, arguing that

The promise – if not the delivery – of a cognitive map of the metropolis responds to an intense but directionless longing for community on the part of its inhabitants, as well as on the part of the cinematic audience (watching an ensemble film, one can hardly help wondering: who are these people sitting next to me in the darkened theater?). (138)

Therefore in showing convergences between broad social cross sections and cognitively mapping these social and physical spaces, network films explore the potential of urban space to facilitate a mode of community in opposition to alienation.

Another theory that bears relevance to how network films portray spatiotemporal connections is Bakhtin’s idea of the “chronotope”. Bakhtin uses the term chronotope, or “time-space” (Bakhtin [1981] 2004, 84), to signify “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). Referring to Michael Montgomery, Vivian Sobchack stresses that the chronotope is not limited to literature but is particularly applicable in relation to films (1998, 148-49). The chronotope, as Bakhtin describes it, is “[t]he process of

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33 Also see Giuliana Bruno (2002) on “emotional mapping” for a particularly filmic application of the concept of mapping (207-08).
assimilating real historical time and space” in the text ([1981] 2004, 84). In other words, the term chronotope generally refers to the ways in which real history is represented within, represented by, and related to texts. The fact that network films typically depict contemporary or recent social scapes; that spaces shown within the films often bear specific reference to real events; that the films are typically shot on location; and even that the actors bring intertextual significance to their roles (see Bakhtin [1981] 2004, 85), signal various chronotopes at work. These intersections of space, time, and history in both the real and textual worlds offers a rich field for analysis. However, my concern in this chapter is of how the films textually represent the theme of network community via their spatial depictions and whether they do so generically. Since this chapter concentrates on the theory of network community as it is displayed in the films’ spatial representations, therefore, Bakhtin’s theory is not foregrounded, although it offers much to discuss elsewhere.

As evident in Hsu’s quote above and throughout my discussion of network community, the spatial connections between characters and the films’ cognitive maps often convey themes of communal belonging which comes in response to a longstanding complaint that cities foster alienation (Simmel [1903] 1997, 70; Rheingold 1994, 25; Hiroto 1974, 187-9; Geis and Ross 1998). Nezar AlSayyad, quoting Paul Virilio, describes the common idea that “in the modern and postmodern city, ‘lives [are] lived next to each other without touching’” (2006, 166). Network films frequently address this question directly. For instance, as quoted earlier, Grahame’s opening lines in Crash state

In any real city, you walk, you brush past people, people bump into you. In L.A., nobody touches you. We’re always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much, that we crash into each other, just so we can feel something.

Bordwell also describes this topic, saying

Many films seem to assume that with the dissolution of traditional rural communities, cities created aggregates of isolated individuals, each pursuing his or her own aims. Accordingly, themes associated with urban solitude, unfulfilled promise, the lonely crowd, and casual encounters in alien spaces…come to the fore. (2008a, 213)
Such a sense of alienation is a key reason why network films place so much attention on physical connections as well as character parallels. Relevantly stressing the importance of connections in urban space, Andreas Wittel remarks that “the rise of a network sociality is especially visible in urban (post)industrial spaces and milieus” (2001, 53, original emphasis). In showing characters connecting circumstantially and physically, these films consider the idea that network community is tangible and indiscriminate. Network films frequently use cities to illustrate multicultural intersections and milieus, as public arenas allow characters to cross paths and have brief but meaningful encounters. Some of the films offer the theme of network community as a rebuke to the notion that cities are alienating and community nonexistent. This chapter further illuminates the extents to which polyphony is spatialised and measures the spatial privilege accorded to network community, in order to determine whether these seven films from various backgrounds treat space in generic ways.

**Iconic Cities and Local Points of View**

Despite being set in very different and famous cities, the seven network films tend to emphasise local perspectives rather than a tourist gaze. I contend that such local points of view are core aspects of these seven films’ narratives and constitute a generic semantic marker in the domain of “recognizable shots” as Altman describes (1999, 89). *Love, Code Unknown, Lantana, and Crash* focus on the characters’ experiences in the cities of Jakarta, Paris, Sydney, and Los Angeles respectively without venturing to give many panoramic shots of famous icons. Instead, we often see the surroundings from the characters’ points of view, and iconic and/or identifying landmarks are only typically visible in the backgrounds. For instance, in *Love* we see Siti walking down a downtown Jakarta street but the camera remains focused on her central position within the landscape rather than diverting to show particular shots of the surrounding buildings. While Salma travels to a television studio we briefly see city buildings, but the single take is framed from within the car window, suggesting a point of view shot rather than a panorama (Figure 6.3). Similarly, in *Lantana*, at one point we see Leon’s car with the CBD in the far background but the cityscape is obscured with rain, uncharacteristic of the view of Australia as a sunny country (Figure 6.1). At another point we only see a brief panorama shot above Balmain with Sydney Harbour in the distance (sans Opera House) before the camera pans down to show Leon running through the neighbourhood. *Lantana* thereby provides minimal views of the iconic city’s panorama. *Crash* focuses
on the characters themselves within their environments in ways that highlight the characters’ feelings of belonging or disjunction within the particular places.³⁴ It predominantly uses close ups and mid shots rather than panoramas, and in the few instances Crash does show panoramas of Los Angeles all but one of these are at night time, where the darkness and twinkling lights appear almost indistinguishable from those of any other big city (Figure 6.2). Instead of panoramic tourist shots of the Paris skyline or establishing shots which locate its characters in famous tourist sites, Haneke deliberately renders Paris almost unrecognisable and bland in Code Unknown (Figure 6.4). This is in order to stress the story’s applicability to many Western societies (Sinnerbrink 2011, 119; Wheatley 2009, 21). Therefore it is highly probable that a stylistic focus on local points of view is a generic semantic factor amongst network films.

Even Mumbai, Edge and Babel, which show distinct and iconic settings more often than the other four films, concentrate on portraying local perspectives and local politics relating to these sights. Mumbai shows the famous Haji Ali Dargah mosque, but frames it in the background (Figure 6.5). Apart from this icon the rest of the film uses

³⁴ See Tuan’s book Space and Place (1977) for a discussion on the concepts of space and place, space being more abstract and boundless, place connoting particular and often familiar areas (3).
locations which are non-touristic sites. In Edge establishing shots at various points show Lotte in Istanbul’s Taksim Square, Ayten and Lotte on the Bosporus river, and the city square of Bremen as Ali walks past the May Day parade. Yet the film privileges a local gaze throughout these and other scenes, denying us any prolonged panoramic shots found in other non-network films such as Head-On (Akin 2004) or A Touch of Spice (Boulmetis 2003). When Lotte chases the boys she seems to know Istanbul’s backstreets well, further establishing the film and characters’ local points of view (Figure 6.6).

Babel is slightly different to these other films which de-emphasise tourist perspectives. Through the gazes of the American children on entering Mexico and through Susan’s gaze in Morocco Babel refers to tourist perspectives in order to critique their lack of understanding of local social problems. At the same time Babel uses colour schemes to differentiate the segments in Morocco (dusty yellows and browns), Japan (cold blues, greens and whites [Figure 6.7]), America (warm yellows and greens) and Mexico (inviting warm reds, oranges and yellows [Figure 6.8]). This leads to the compelling accusation that, although it displays local points of view, Babel also problematically renders these spaces exotic, contradictorily “attempt[ing] to create a ‘world cinema’ gaze within a commercial Hollywood framework” (Shaw 2011, 11, 20; Kerr 2010, 47). Nonetheless, each of the seven case studies predominantly uses non-panoramic, location-grounded perspectives in order to convey local experiences and points of view. I thereby contend that this is a semantic element, although it can be used to different effect in the films’ representational politics.
Looking further afield, although some network films such as *New Year’s Eve* (Marshall 2011), *Paris*, *He’s Just Not That Into You* and *Love Actually* intermittently contain shots of famous icons and are set amongst them, these films also concentrate on local characters’ perspectives. These films, as do the seven considered here, claim to represent realistic, local, intimate and insightful points of view into placed that are globally recognised. This realism effect and local emphasis importantly provides a basis from which the films can construct believable portraits of network community. The prevalence of this style and resulting theme amongst the different films supports the claim that they comprise generic semantic and syntactic aspects. The next section delves further into how the seven case studies represent space, considering how the characters use spaces in ways that closely relate to their syntactic theme of network community.

**Characters’ Mobility and the Blurring of Public and Private Spaces**

As is typical in cinema, characters’ socioeconomic positions are frequently reflected and/or offset by the surroundings in which they appear. For instance, in *Crash* Rick and Jean’s expensively furnished and decorated house indicate wealth and prestige, as does Cameron and Christine’s. In contrast, the characters of Turkish background in *Edge* are shown at a distance from German society in below-ground rooms, iterating Hamid Naficy’s observation that immigrants in diasporic Iranian and Turkish German cinema occupy “phobic spaces” (Naficy 2003, 213-223; Silvey and Hillman 2010, 111).

In the seven films, the spaces characters use help to represent the diversity of the social cross sections. All of these films contrast the homes and/or neighbourhoods of wealthy, middle class and lower class characters. This creates an astute and realistic view of characters’ different economic positions. For instance, most of the characters in *Mumbai* are associated with a particular type of dwelling illustrating their socioeconomic status. Thomas and his wife live in a slum, whereas Nikhil and his wife live in a large and
comfortable modern house as does Rupali. Similar spatial contrasts and relationships are present throughout the other five case studies. These surrounds infer the characters’ class and cultural statuses.

Illustrating the theme of network community, however, is the way in which characters move through spaces and transgress boundaries, particularly those of their (stereo)typical socioeconomic environments. This section discusses how characters move through areas and render space fluid rather than segregated, offering a theme of communal space in support of the theme of network community. Here I define public space as anywhere which is not a home belonging to the characters. This includes streets, public transport, shops, restaurants, cafés, hotels, and other spaces which are not domestically owned. Conversely, I define private space as domestic and personalised places, often legally owned or rented by the characters. Evidently in these different spaces there are different relations of capital, and some of these instances are analysed presently.

It is frequently noted that with contemporary mobile information technologies and “broader patterns of media globalization, as well as broader patterns of social life”, divisions between public and private spaces become blurred (Berry, Kim and Spigel 2010, xii). Significantly, throughout the films characters cross divisions between public and private spaces. This is a key motif which enhances their themes of network community, evoking the concept of flânerie (flânerie in network films also has been noted by Niazi 2010, 4-5). The flâneur is the figure of “the city stroller” who walks around cities purveying the workings of society (Baudelaire [1851] 1997, 17; Benjamin 1973, 55; Clarke 1997; Tester 1999; de Certeau 1984). David B. Clarke (1997, 7), in his introduction to The Cinematic City, cites the flâneur as a figure analogous to the role of cinema since the film camera allows us to survey the lives of others. Resembling the flâneur, cinema observes characters’ lives as if through Charles Baudelaire’s “windows” (Baudelaire [1851] 1997, 3-4), turning “strangers” into imagined familiars. Similarly, network films portray the lives of strangers who also often physically cross each others’ paths akin to the encounters between Baudelaire’s subjects (see Baudelaire [1851] 1997, 118). These characters and film cameras thus engage in acts of flânerie which cross both public and private spaces.
In conducting such flânerie the seven case studies create familiarity between strangers in order to emphasise the theme of network community. This section therefore explores whether the seven films portray characters’ movements and behaviours within and between public and private spaces in generic ways. If they do so, this motif would seem to cross both semantic/syntactic fields. The spaces in which characters appear would fall into the semantic aspect of “locations”, while the ways in which characters use such locations to illustrate the theme of network community would conceivably fulfil the definition of syntax as the “constitutive relationships between … variable placeholders” (Altman 1984, 10). I thereby investigate whether the representations of space and how characters relate to it indeed offer semantic/syntactic similarities.

*Code Unknown* creates visual disparities between the spaces and places characters inhabit and use in order to convey disjunctures in experiences of wealth, poverty and culture in Paris. Cameron (2008, 156) argues in relation to *Code Unknown* that spatial heterogeneity can critique and question the notion that people who live in the same city or country automatically constitute a community. These settings blur public and private space, illustrating the characters’ different senses of entitlement and feelings of responsibility to others in the city. Anne and Georges feel entitled to have an argument and passionate embrace in a supermarket (Anne rudely telling a wary onlooker to mind her own business). In contrast, Maria is fully exposed while begging on the street but the price of being noticed is her deportation, while Amadou occupies similar antagonistic and disadvantaged positions, being arrested during the scuffle and living in a small apartment with his large family. Anne occupies a flat to which she can deny anyone access, but the film stresses that the security wealth provides fails to grant safety, however, as entrapment within and danger from upper class and high-rise surroundings are key themes of both Anne’s two movie scenes within *Code Unknown*. Anne also chooses to ignore the evidence that a neighbouring young girl is being abused. Later Anne and her neighbour attend the girl’s funeral, inferring that Anne was partly responsible for the girl’s death and condemning her inaction. These contrasting spatial positions highlight the characters’ different, polyphonic experiences and critique the lack of cosmopolitan social behaviour. At the same time, since Amadou’s defence of Maria inadvertently leads to her deportation, the film suggests that cosmopolitan behaviour faces many dead ends in the face of systemic inequalities. Spaces in *Code Unknown* are represented in ways that blur the division between notions of public and private, showing that none of the characters are able to live private lives and are always
already ingrained in public space, although to different effects. In this spatial blurring and characters’ networked relationships via spatial encounters, Code Unknown suggests that characters are always already situated in communal spaces.

As in Code Unknown, in Mumbai the spaces characters occupy and use blur any clear division between public and private space. Suresh lives a life with no privacy, as by day he frequents a café, constantly surrounded by his friends and fellow customers, while at night he sleeps in a dormitory. Thomas similarly only finds privacy in one scene in an alleyway. He works as a cleaner in a house while the occupants are present, and the interior of his shanty home is not shown, although at one point he sits on a rooftop in the shanty area. Patil is a man of the public as a police officer, journalists invade Rupali’s private life and grief as they broadcast her life story on television; and at home Nikhil is plagued by his wife and family’s nagging. These instances critique social institutions, suggest that there is little privacy within private spaces, and comment on the effect of terrorism in Mumbai, showing characters to be beleaguered and insecure in their own city. This blurring of public and private space thus emphasises the common experience of alienation between characters. But unlike Code Unknown, Mumbai does not thoroughly convey the characters’ spatial disjunctures, since it drastically minimises the view of poorer spaces such as Thomas and Suresh’s abodes in contrast to its appealing exposure of wealthier spaces such as Rupali and Nikhil’s homes. Mumbai, much like Code Unknown, blurs the boundaries between public and private spaces. Yet it does so to convey the mutual and implicitly equal suffering of each of its characters, unlike Code Unknown’s dedication to exposing characters’ experiential disjunctures. Nevertheless, in both films the blurring of these spaces illustrates the theme of network community, which suggests that the motif of blurred spaces may be a generic semantic/syntactic factor.

Similar to Code Unknown and Mumbai, Crash blurs the boundaries between public and private space. Racial politics frequently infringe on domestic space in Crash. For instance, Farhad’s family-run store is vandalised, with racial insults painted on the walls. Rick holds political meetings in his and Jean’s own lounge room. Jean yells at Rick within the Mexican locksmith Daniel’s earshot about her fears that Daniel will later let “his homies” in to burgle their house. And Daniel’s job is to transgress the threshold between public and private, between danger and security. Even he has been the victim of intrusion, having moved away from a house in which his daughter’s
bedroom had been fired at. These private spaces are thus shown to be intricately involved with the social sphere and in particular the racism which the film critiques. Transport, a significant indicator of social class in Los Angeles as Anthony points out (also see Holtclaw et al. 2), is a key motif in *Crash*. Characters transgress class and racial boundaries through their use of various modes of transport. Anthony and Peter hijack both Rick and Cameron’s Lincoln Navigators, signalling both the vulnerability and privilege of the wealthy people’s privacy. Tom shoots Peter in his car, a private, personalised space that comes to symbolise the police force’s corruption and the theme of pervasive, inherent racism in Los Angeles. The motif of transport is thus used to highlight the transgression of public and private space as well as class boundaries. *Crash*’s settings recall the infiltration of the public eye and characters’ insecurities about their safety and privacy in domestic and public spaces in *Code Unknown* and *Mumbai*. These motifs give additional weight to the claim that the blurring of public and private space is a semantic/syntactic element in network films.

*Lantana* features a degree of spatial transgressions between different classes of neighbourhoods and a prominent blurring of public and private space. Crucial to this emphasis on local perspective and the closely knit collection of network characters and their spatial transgressions is the film’s theme of the “Australian fantasy of neighbourliness” as Duncanson et al. discuss (2004, 7). Leon’s job as a police officer means that as part of the investigation into Valerie’s death he travels into different people’s homes and workspaces. He bursts into a criminal’s house, peruses Valerie’s office, travels to the houses of John, Jane, and Nik and Paula, and interrupts Patrick’s meeting with his lover at a hotel room. Similar to the locksmith in *Crash*, Leon is granted access to a wide range of environments and breaks down the conceptual boundaries between the different characters in showing how they are connected to himself and Valerie. His travels are permitted rather than revolutionarily transgressive, and the film’s conclusion restores the imagined boundaries between suburbs and classes. This use of spatial parameters critiques a failure of neighbourliness (Duncanson et al. 2004, 18).

Elsewhere in *Lantana* spaces such as the restaurant in which Claudia meets her crush, the café in which Leon tells Jane he is still in love with his wife, the hotel room in which Patrick meets his lover, and the pub bathroom in which Leon and Pete have a heart to heart all signal the blurring of public and private relationships and spaces. As in
Crash, vehicles in Lantana become uncertain areas where public and private concerns merge. Leon’s use of cars traverse different physical and social spaces and relationships, as he uses his to drive to Jane’s house and John’s house, in it he finds his mistress’s missing earring, and in a police vehicle he has a personal conversation with John. Cars thus function as ambiguous and fluid mobile spaces both in terms of the city and social domains. Nik’s ute also becomes a semi-public, semi-private environment when he offers Valerie a lift. And Sonya nearly has sex with a young man in his car in a public car park. Lantana’s characters, akin to those of Crash, Code Unknown and Mumbai, transgress public and private spaces and behaviours so that the fragility and interconnectedness of their relationships are shown. This adds impetus to the claim that this blurring of public and private is a generic semantic/syntactic trope in network films.

Gradually Edge crosses borders to show characters traversing different areas, although it remains attuned to the asynchronies involved in their different experiences. Within Germany the Turkish and Turkish-German characters Ali, Nejat and Yeter are framed at a remove from the rest of German society and are spatially marginalised, occupying below-ground rooms and an “ivory tower” academic office (Silvey and Hillman 2010, 108). When Nejat and Ali eat ice cream outside the Bremen central station, they appear to be the only ones sitting, while everyone behind them walks by (Figure 6.9).
Nejat and Ali’s personal use of this public space contrasts with Zygmunt Bauman’s assertion that in capitalism “the public space is an arena to move through, not be in” (1994, 149), although they appear somewhat awkward in contrast to the surrounding mobile people (Silvey and Hillman 2010, 108). As in Code Unknown, Crash and Lantana, modes of transport blur notions of public and private space in Edge. On a train two fundamentalist thugs harass Yeter for being a prostitute. Later Nejat and Yeter, having just met that evening, share a train ride in which they get to know each other better. Lotte’s car conveys hospitality and also both the transgression and extension of private space when she drives Ayten around Bremen looking for Ayten’s mother. Lotte’s hospitality symbolises a continuation of Germany’s role as host to Turkish immigrants and an unusually active gesture on Germany’s part to reunite the guestworker parents with children (see Martin 1994, 189). While polyphonically articulating differences of experiences that first and second generation migrants face in Germany, within these settings Edge emphasises a blurring of public and private spaces and behaviours, as do Code Unknown, Mumbai, Crash, and Lantana. Once again this intimates that such a motif is likely to be a semantic/syntactic tradition in network films.

Edge spatially gravitates towards Turkey as a site of cross cultural hospitality and reconciliation, thus blurring the concept of borders between Europe and Turkey. When Susanne allows Ayten to stay with her and Lotte in Germany she does so begrudgingly; whereas in Istanbul Nejat rents a room to Lotte and happily lets Susanne stay in the room Lotte had rented in his apartment. While Nejat appears at home in both cities and countries, in Istanbul he has more professional, personal and physical control over his environs. And it is notable that we never see his home in Germany whereas in Istanbul his flat is sunlit, spacious and inviting. In Germany Nejat takes public transport, symbolising a distanced relationship to the country (as signalled in the glass and reflections which obscure his appearance) but in Turkey he drives a car often with the windows rolled down, signifying a personal connection with the landscape and a sense of homecoming. These modes of transport reflect Naficy’s theories of the representation of host country space as claustrophobic in films about Turkish German migrants (2003, 213-223). As in Crash, Lantana, Mumbai and Code Unknown, blurred public and private spaces thus function significantly in Edge to emphasise issues of cultural tensions and cosmopolitanism. The prevalence of this motif in each of these films bears strong implications of being generic.
In *Love* many of the spaces that characters use show a blurring between the notion of a division between public and private. The medical clinic signifies a cosmopolitan space in which the women in the film can in some capacity escape from their marriages and find aid. Similarly, the restaurant in which Ming works is a public space, so when Pak Hajji dines there with his second wife he publically exposes his polygamy. Salma eventually opens her household to Pak Hajji’s other wives and children, an act which is later echoed by the household in which Siti lives with Pak Lik’s three other wives and numerous children. These places signal the hazy emotional boundaries of polygamous marital relationships, as illustrated when Pak Lik enjoys a threesome with Siti and Sri. Similarly, Ming’s domestic space is not her own since Koh Abun rents it for her and Cik Linda later evicts her. Throughout *Love* these blurred divisions between public and private life highlight the theme of the women’s dissatisfaction with polygamy and their lack of privately owned space. This desire for a female space, symbolised by the female medical clinic, together with the women’s connectedness, suggests that women throughout Indonesia and possibly elsewhere experience similar problems. In addition to *Code Unknown*, *Mumbai*, *Crash*, *Lantana* and *Edge*, *Love*’s representation of transgressions between public and private spaces and behaviours suggests that this is in fact a generic semantic/syntactic component of network films.

*Babel* also takes up themes of hospitality as it shows the blurring of public and private space. Richard and Susan argue at an outdoor restaurant, the tour guide houses Richard and Susan, and Amelia’s cramped room in Richard and Susan’s home blurs the boundary of her identity as a family member or servant. In part *Babel* draws on common traditions of decrying urban alienation and asynchronic technologies. Chieko walks through the streets after her spirits are crushed at the nightclub; her sense of experiential disconnection to other people highlighted by the framing and uses of silence and low noise to convey her deafness and feeling of exclusion from the noisy events happening around her. Thus, similar to *Code Unknown*, *Crash*, *Edge*, *Mumbai*, *Lantana*, and *Love*, *Babel* blurs borders between public and private spaces, implying that this is a generic trait.

Each of the seven films blurs the boundaries between public and private space. While this is not particularly innovative for cinema in itself, the fact that through such blurring network films draw the theme of network community is distinctive. So far, the
fact that the seven network films comparably blur these dividing lines indicates that this trait may be a semantic/syntactic element. In all the case studies, domestic space and the division between the public and private worlds become unsettled, private conflicts and problems between characters are expressed or erupt in public or semi-public places, and semi-public spaces can also function as sites of rejuvenation and/or private engagements for characters. Private vehicles often become sites of public interactions and conversely, public transport (typically accused of being alienating and impersonal), becomes personalised and a site of communal interactions (cf. E. Anderson 2004, 25). Hotels, cafés, restaurants, workplaces and other areas are framed as semi-public and semi-private areas, drawing attention to the characters’ connections to one another on a broad level that is both public and private. And questions of class segregation and the types of access people have to different types of spaces are often raised. Spatial transgressions convey the films’ concern with critiquing and/or reimagining the particular societies and politics of space in these contemporary settings. This common concern strongly suggests that the blurring of public and private space is a semantic element of network films, syntactically accommodating intimations of network community. The two sections on character encounters and closure later in this chapter further consider the possibility that the spatial depictions of network community could signal a syntax at work.

International Relations

As well as traversing cities locally, network films often forge connections between different cities and countries. In a body of films so thematically concerned with globalisation and the idea of the world, how they portray and relate different geographical and cultural spaces is important to how they convey network community between these spaces. This brief section considers the element of international connections made in four of the case studies: Code Unknown, Mumbai, Edge and Babel. Such connections are not recurrent and are thereby not generic aspects, but they do articulate the notion of network community in the relevant films.

In Code Unknown’s case different international spaces are portrayed in fragmentary and disorienting ways rather than being smoothly interrelated through establishing shots, transitions or clear causal signposts. Cameron draws attention to the fact that “the representation of journeys in Code Unknown is characterized by temporal
elisions and interruptions” (2008, 159). For instance, we do not see Georges, Maria nor Amadou’s father’s respective journeys to Kosovo and Afghanistan, Romania or Mali. Yet, we do watch Georges’ father plough a field in a tractor for a relatively long scene, and we frequently see characters walking along the St Germaine Boulevard without seeing them reach any particular destination. A visual composition looking out through a vehicle’s windscreen compares Maria driving with a friend in Romania to Amadou’s father arriving in Mali, with both characters newly returned to their respective homelands. The shot from the windscreen in Mali shows people slowly moving out of the car’s path, while in Romania the road is decrepit with pot holes and the houses lining the street are in disrepair (Figs. 6.10, 6.11).

![Figure 6.10](image1.png) ![Figure 6.11](image2.png)

In this scene Maria and her friend lie to each other about how they earn money in Paris and Dublin respectively, while in Mali it is not clear why Amadou’s father has returned. Again in these scenes a sense of aimlessness is fostered through the slow camera work, calling attention to the characters’ uncertain and precarious senses of belonging in these supposed homelands. *Code Unknown* therefore uses spaces to highlight specific disparities between characters, as well as contrasting experiences of stability and access according to characters’ “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1986, 242). The disjointedness between the international spaces shown in *Code Unknown* significantly contrasts with the emphasis *Edge*, *Babel* and *Mumbai* place on the theme of global connectedness. Rather than suggesting that characters automatically fall into an international network community as some of these other films do, *Code Unknown* suggests that they have the choice and differing abilities to construct a mode of community.

As well as blurring public and private space, *Mumbai* blurs international boundaries. Whereas *Code Unknown* disjoints its international locations, *Mumbai* suggests Mumbai is akin to other countries despite its distance and economic and
cultural differences. Suresh’s opening argument about the French Algerian football player Zidane relates French to local anti-Muslim sentiments, since Zidane’s Muslim identity had recently incited controversy at the soccer World Cup (Jiwani 2008, 12-13). Similarly, in showing footage of the September 11 attacks intercut with recreated scenes of the Mumbai train bombings Mumbai pays homage to the two countries’ suffering. This visualises a theme of global connections and flows (moreover, Nikhil’s friend lives in New York). Yet it does so in a way that ignores the local historic specificity of terrorism and anti-Islamicism. The film remains firmly located in Mumbai, conveying a one-sided perspective without further exploring international relationships such as Indian diaspora or global terrorism. Unlike Code Unknown, it does not sustain a critique of social and spatial disjunctures. Despite their different executions of narrative politics, the fact that both Mumbai and Code Unknown draw international and urban connections in order to convey a networked world offers a minor case for a generic motif.

More specifically than Mumbai’s creation of international links, yet unlike Code Unknown which eclipses the journeys between international spaces and thereby creates a fragmentary view of Europe and its constitutive others, Edge spatially frames its network in order to portray a constitutive relationship between Turkey and Germany (Silvey and Hillman 2010, 99). Edge opens with an intertextual echo that suggests broad European links in keeping with the theme of Turkey’s desired accession to the European Union. The opening shot recalls the final long take of Antonioni’s The Passenger (1975). The Passenger follows the cross-cultural pairing of an American man named David Locke (Jack Nicholson) and a Spanish woman (Maria Schneider) as they travel and commit fraud, leading to Locke’s murder in a town named Osuna in Seville. In the penultimate scene feted for its camera manoeuvres, within a single long take the camera tracks out from the bedroom where Locke has just been murdered and pans across the sandy square. A few scattered people and a brown and white dog wander around oblivious to what has just occurred (Figure 6.12). The camera proceeds to pan right to show a blue bus stop in the mid distance (Figure 6.14). Reminiscent of this panorama, Edge’s opening shot is a wide, slow pan across the sandy promenade of a Turkish gas station where a white and brown dog scrounges for scraps out of a can (Figure 6.13) and a mechanic changes a blue bus’ tyre (Figure 6.15).

35 I presume this could be a deliberate quotation since Akin himself states that he is a “film DJ” with a “mix” of Antonioni, Fassbinder and Gueney in Edge (Pyramide Vidéo 2007).
The atmosphere is that of a hot, lazy summer day as the faint sounds of the radio waft over the quiet vista. Nejat drives in from the right side of the screen yet his arrival barely disrupts the quiet “Bayram”/holiday atmosphere. The quotation is pertinent thematically, as the two films depict cross cultural pairings, international journeys, deaths and mistaken identities. Yet whereas *The Passenger* ends in the protagonist’s death, *The Edge of Heaven* shows Nejat to continue his road trip, his entrance into tunnels presenting a gateway into the triptych. In quoting Antonioni’s *The Passenger*, Akin draws on even broader European and transcultural geographies than his references to New German cinema elsewhere (see Rings 2008; Göktürk 2002; Silvey and Hillman 2010). As such, he actively includes Turkey in the context of a European imaginary. In this intertextual reference and later with its journeys over national borders, Akin’s film draws together international connections, creating the impression of a world that is interconnected between various national borders despite their contrasts. Such linkages are reminiscent of those in *Mumbai* and *Code Unknown*, lending weight to the hypothesis that many network films treat space as internationally linked and comparable in complement to their themes of network community.

*Babel*’s international constellation is the broadest of the seven case studies. Similar to *Code Unknown*’s disjunctions, *Babel*’s lack of close physical proximity between the characters of the different threads places a strong emphasis on the disjointedness of their experiences. Yet its mediated connections, unlike the spatial
disjunctions of *Code Unknown*, provide poignant counterpoints to the character parallels which bemoan the characters’ failure to recognise their connections (see Chapter Four 113-14). Instead of questioning whether it is valid to call these people a community as *Code Unknown* does, *Babel* assumes a universalism which elides local specificities. It does so in a way comparable to *Mumbai* and *Crash*, all of which thematically unify their characters with the aid of eliding certain spatial locations that can create immitigable experiential disjuncture. As described in Chapters Four (122-3) and Five (159-60), *Babel’s* editing practices and synchronic character arcs help to build strong audiovisual and thematic links between its characters and spaces. While colour filters and juxtaposing shots emphasise the striking differences between its geographies, its character connections and stories overlay these disparities with the message that the world is inevitably interconnected and its citizens are in need of humanistic treatment. Similar to *Edge*, then, *Babel* draws close relationships between its international spaces. Yet politically speaking *Babel* is more similar to *Mumbai* than *Edge* in its universalising approach to international relations. As many have noted, *Babel* conveys a humanistic message, but does so by providing an overly simplistic, stereotypical and condescending portrait of its characters and international politics (see Kerr 2010; Hassapopoulou 2008; Shaw 2011). These narrative politics aside, it is clear that *Babel* connects international spheres in order to emphasise its theme of network community and portray the effects of globalisation, as do *Code Unknown, Mumbai* and *Edge*.

Four out of the seven case study films, *Code Unknown, Mumbai, Edge* and *Babel*, depict international journeys or make references to countries beyond their narrative borders. Complementing themes of multiculturalism which run throughout the seven films in different ways, these examples portray the world within and beyond national borders as intricately linked although, in the case of *Babel* and *Code Unknown*, highly disjunctive. Their similarities underscore the point that the seven films are concerned thematically and spatially with crossing borders which typically segregate and differentiate societies. They verify Roberts’ observation that in recent years there exist films which are stylistically and thematically “about…‘the world’” (1998, 63). While this international element is not common throughout all network films, it does illustrate a prominent thematic commonality that is significant to how many of these films depict social and spatial boundaries as blurred.
Close Encounters

In foregrounding public space as a place of encounters, network films draw attention to the notion of community through proximity. As noted in Chapter Two (45-46), it is often thought that people who share space and place, for example a neighbourhood or office building, form a community (Tönnies 1979 cited in Wittel 2001, 62). Alongside their ephemeral connections via character parallels, in network films character links are concretised in predominantly urban spaces where characters intersect, signalling to viewers the formation of network community. The types of spaces in which characters intersect and gather together bear influence on whether and how the idea of community and/or cosmopolitan space is shown. Some films suggest that the encounters between characters are meaningful and that therefore the entire city or world contains meaningful connections. Other films take a more coincidental approach, suggesting that connections are arbitrary and random rather than destined. Encounters can take a variety of forms. Strangers meet, in some cases get to know one another, or in others remain ignorant of one another although they occupy the same vicinity. Such scenes may actively configure space as communal, or may expose spatial differences and asynchronies that critique, describe, or reinstate certain social and spatial ruptures.

In Chapter Four (135) I noted that Code Unknown presents unusually few encounters between network characters. It also emphasises the divergence and scarcity of encounters between characters spatially. Allan Cameron observes that the film enacts a “spatial dispersal” as characters drift further afield from one another’s proximity (2008, 153). In Code Unknown characters’ encounters highlight their socioeconomic inequalities, disjunctures and incommensurability. These encounters also question public space’s potential for communal behaviour and critique Europe’s lack of hospitality towards non-Western “European” countries. At Code Unknown’s outset Anne offers Jean her apartment to stay in, but insists that his stay be temporary rather than allowing him to stay as long as he needs. Amadou’s self-interested intention to help Maria by seeking Jean’s apology rather than offering Maria direct help leads to her being deported (see Geyh 2011, 109). And Anne and Amadou’s presence in the restaurant rekindles their mutual hostilities. Thus, a lack of hospitality is on the one hand inferred in characters’ spatial encounters.
On the other hand, spatial encounters in *Code Unknown* between non-network characters and network characters can be understood to tentatively suggest a potential for network community. Notably, an instance of kindness between strangers occurs on a train, when an Arab man defends Anne against an Arab youth (see Chapter Two 62). As noted earlier, the Arab man’s deference to Anne recalls France’s colonial past, suggesting that compassion towards others in public spaces can possibly remedy social conflicts. Yet we do not see if Anne and the older Arab man say anything more to each other after she thanks him and stifles her tears. Although *Code Unknown*’s encounters take place on the public and semi-public places of streets, a café and trains, any sense of mutually beneficial and equal communal relations is rendered complex and in most cases abortive. This leads Cameron to write that *Code Unknown* “depicts a transnational ethnoscape defined by flows of immigration (legal and illegal) that are not always commensurate with flows of capital and culture” (2008, 158). Although they highlight characters’ disjunctures, *Code Unknown* uses character encounters to once again blur the notion of distinguishable public and private space and thereby to construct a tentative vision of network community.

*Mumbai*’s encounters illustrate public space as an arena in which characters’ social powers differentiate them, but the fact that these network characters intersect in these spaces also suggests that the city conjoins their lives. In contrast to *Code Unknown*, *Mumbai* offers more positivity in its characters’ connections. Nikhil and Suresh happen to be on the trains which are blown up, and they are shown sitting close to one another in the wreckage, both in shock. Suresh, Thomas and Patil encounter one another directly in the scene in which Thomas sells tea to Suresh whom Patil and Kadam reprimand for accosting an old Muslim man. Kadam drains away Thomas’ supply of tea, indicating the police force’s control of public space and their generally apathetic treatment of poor people. Later Patil happens to see Suresh again on a street and lectures him on moral decency, turning the police’s control of public space into a potentially proactive role. *Mumbai*’s encounters between characters thus emphasise public space as an arena in which to establish communal bonds and foster communal spirit. Both *Mumbai* and *Code Unknown* thereby use character encounters similarly to render public spaces potentially communal, suggesting that this may be a generic semantic/syntactic trope.
Crash seeks to show the problems which Los Angeles’ spatial segregations engender. Los Angeles is frequently described as a “fortress city” because of its spatial segregation of people of different classes and races (Davis 1992, 154). In response to this notion, Crash’s character encounters and their spatial transgressions suggest the possibility of a communal use of space. At the beginning of the film characters’ encounters highlight social alienation and danger in supposedly safe public areas. Anthony and Peter hijack Rick and Jean’s car on a busy street; John molests Christine on a main street; Farhad attacks Daniel in a quiet neighbourhood; and Tom shoots Peter in his police car. But Crash also seeks to show some of these encounters as restorative, whereby these public spaces become safe and communal. Tom saves Cameron and simultaneously Cameron protects Anthony during a standoff in a wealthy neighbourhood, thus teaching Anthony to reform his violent ways. When John rescues Christine from the overturned burning car in the midst of the crowded road, the confines of the car create a private space within the public domain. It provides an intimate space in which John and Christine once again confront one another, this time restoratively. This scene recalls that in Mumbai where the police officer Patil reprimands Suresh in the confines of his police van, and a less authoritarian encounter is also present in Lantana where John confesses his lies to Leon while sitting in the police car. These instances of intense and personal encounters between representatives of the law and civilians in semi-public spaces again represent the likely generic motif of spatially contrived network community.

Yet although Crash critiques Los Angeles’ spatial segregations by showing public and private spaces perforated by interracial clashes and moments of redemption, in many cases these scenes reinstate and naturalise such divisions and convey problematic narrative politics. As Vorris L. Nunley describes, the scene of John rescuing Christine portrays an unequal power relationship in which Christine is rendered a body to be pacified whereas John has complete agency (2007, 344; see Chapter Three 96-7). Early in the film Anthony hits upon the irony that as black men he and Peter should be more scared of a heavily white-populated area than Jean is of them. Yet he and Peter proceed to justify Jean’s fear when they attack her and Rick (see Chapter Three 83-4). Similar cases occur in the neighbourhood encounters between Farhad and Daniel and Cameron, Anthony and Tom. These scenes show that such public spaces can be victim to the intrusion of the volatile ethnic others and, as such, infer that the reputed safety of gated communities might be preferable to such moments
of terror. Despite their different narrative politics, reminiscent of *Code Unknown* and *Mumbai, Crash* portrays significant public encounters between characters. These close encounters give weight to the claim that public encounters are generic semantic sites of network films which syntactically critique and re-envision the contemporary state of community.

*Lantana* places a strong emphasis on public encounters between characters, thus raising questions about the possibility of community and neighbourliness. At the outset it seems as if neighbourly community is going well, as Jane and Paula are friends – their domestic proximity to one another having thrown them together. Yet the film enacts a deconstruction of such “neighbourliness” (Duncanson et al. 2004, 18) and many public encounters are uncomfortable. Jane plans to make an encounter with Leon seem accidental when she waits outside his office for him to appear. This encounter betrays Leon’s affair to Claudia and leads to reparations later on. Actual chance encounters result in violence, as Valerie yells at Pete on the street amidst a line of people sitting at restaurants, and Leon yells at the man with whom he collides while jogging through a quiet suburban street. Yet these encounters also suggest that neighbourhoods and public spaces can be prone to network community. When the jogger bursts into tears, Leon comforts him. And Valerie’s encounter with Pete leads him to seek recovery in a bar where he happens to chat with Leon: a conversation which develops into a “heart to heart” in the bathroom (Figure 6.16).
These are intense public encounters which reveal the characters’ inner conflicts, in some cases turning the public space into an intimate setting (a theme which is continued in the final scenes when Claudia meets her crush in a restaurant). *Lantana*, much like *Code Unknown, Crash* and *Mumbai*, configures public space as a place of violent and/or significant encounters. As in *Code Unknown* and to some extents *Crash, Lantana* uses these encounters to question the possibility of community while at the same time showing a breakdown of neighbourliness elsewhere. Its resulting connections between characters and contrivance of network community are more closely knit than these other three films, yet not as close as those in *Edge*. The prevalence of the theme of public space as a potentially communal space in each of these films convincingly implies that this is a core semantic/syntactic aspect of network films.

During *Edge* character encounters, missed connections and visual echoes convey the Turkish and German spaces as transnational and communal. During the Bremen excursion when Lotte and Ayten happen to pass Nejat and Yeter in a train beside them, this short scene’s temporal glitch depicts the city as a catalyst for “six degrees of separation” between strangers (Figure 6.17).

![Figure 6.17](image_url)

It seems that since they do not make eye contact or talk to one another, Nejat and Yeter are sharing this public space before they later meet each other. This scene thereby portrays the popular network motif of strangers-as-potential-friends in proximity. The motif of history in motion is also pertinent in this scene. Here, as Lotte and Ayten pass Nejat and Yeter, the generational levels are multiplied, with the older generations
occupying the public transport, while the younger share a more intimate and independent rather than state-owned vehicle. Elsewhere spatial echoes offer the suggestion that there are hidden symmetries, transnational connections, and lingering presences wherever people go. For instance, as noted earlier, Lotte and Ayten are shown sitting on either side of the ferry across the Bosphorus; in prison Ayten reaches out a hand to pull Lotte over to her side of the room just as outside his apartment Nejat helps to pull Susanne up from the stoop; the shot of Yeter’s coffin being unloaded from a plane matches that of Lotte’s coffin being loaded onto a plane in Istanbul; both Lotte and Susanne are shown to greet the same group of men outside Nejat’s Istanbul apartment; and Ayten and Lotte are each shown from high angles, map in hand, searching each other’s country (Bremen and Istanbul respectively) for a loved one. In these latter two scenes both the young women are framed within the cities’ main squares. In each of these echoes, the poignant dramatic irony of the characters’ unrecognised spatial connections emphasises the contingency of these bonds. These tracing shots and spatial echoes emphasise the asynchrony of the characters’ proximities as well as the potential for their connections, similar to those in *Code Unknown* and *Crash*. Yet in rendering these spaces familiar to the viewers, *Edge* underscores the theme of network community’s pervasiveness. As in *Code Unknown*, *Mumbai*, *Crash*, and *Lantana*, *Edge* also represents public space as having the potential to be communal rather than alienating. This key topic and theme bolsters the proposition that this is a semantic/syntactic quality of network films.

Despite using colour filters to differentiate Jakarta’s areas, in *Love* the characters’ intersections suggest that Jakarta’s many different spaces are threaded together with communal experiences. The restaurant in which Ming works and Salma frequents is a site showing common knowledge and polite restraint between them. As noted already, when Salma picks up takeaway one night she and Ming see that Pak Hajji is there with his second wife. Although this is news to Ming, she (awkwardly) keeps her surprise quiet. This common but unspoken knowledge casts the restaurant as a site of local knowledge, where Ming tries to spare Salma embarrassment. Similarly, the medical clinic, filmed in calming green and white tones, is a cosmopolitan space as here Salma aids Siti and Dwi. And the final “swap” between Siti and Ming of living in the lower class neighbourhood signals another spatially defined cosmopolitan exchange. These encounters construct cosmopolitan relationships between the three network characters, uniting Jakarta’s distinct areas. Early in the second segment Siti walks by
Cik Linda who is waiting for Ming in her van, as we see again in the third segment. This scene further suggests that such coincidental connections are rife throughout the city. The fact that the Aceh tsunami connects each of the threads and, similar to Mumbai, inspires their sense of patriotic responsibility, grounds these characters within a national proximity. Although the colour filters create a sense of contrast between the characters’ different social positions and experiences, the spatial, public and cosmopolitan connections underscore the thematic parallelism of these women’s dissatisfaction with polygamy and their pursuit of freedom and private space. As in Mumbai, Crash, Code Unknown, Lantana and Edge, Love features character encounters which render public and semi-public spaces communal. Akin to Mumbai and Edge more so than Code Unknown, Crash and Lantana, Love presents a unifying vision of the city and nation, concentrating on characters’ ultimately synchronic although to certain extents polyphonic experiences. As in all the films addressed so far, this presentation of public space as a site of cosmopolitan encounters and catalysts for the consideration of network community strongly implies that this is a semantic/syntactic element of network films.

Unlike the other six films, Babel does not feature any direct character encounters between the different narrative threads. Instead, as discussed earlier (Chapter Four 123-4), Babel uses media links to show how characters are interrelated. Rather than simply uniting single city spaces or drawing connections between closely related countries as the other six films do, Babel’s character connections draw global connections between countries which are typically regarded as very different to one another. The fact that characters do not directly encounter one another suggests that the film conveys a strong disjuncture between their experiences, as indeed it also attempts to convey by juxtaposing contrasting places. Yet the character parallels discussed in Chapter Three, visual linkages analysed in Chapter Four, and temporal synchrony discussed in Chapter Five all demonstrate that Babel creates a strong sense of network community via its character connections despite the fact we do not see them physically interact. Thus, although Babel differs from the six other films in that it does not contain encounters between network characters in public spaces which unite urban spaces, it confers global connections in its character connections. Babel thereby constructs its connections in the view of representing the world’s spaces as potentially communal. This prevalence confers generic status on this quality in network films.
Each of the seven case studies spatialise character encounters in ways that render various public and semi-public spaces communal. Even *Babel*, which shows no physical encounters between network characters, constructs an international community through its use of character parallels and narrative linkages. The films exhibit different political qualities in their spatialisation of network community. *Code Unknown* offers fleeting glimpses of public space as communal rather than disjunctured; *Lantana* seriously questions the legitimacy of neighbourliness in Australian society, although it too offers the hope that public encounters may lead to communal bonds; *Crash* infers that all citizens are communally bound through their encounters and parallels, showing some degree of visceral cosmopolitanism; *Mumbai Jaan* works similarly as its characters are proximately and thematically united; *Love* also spatially unites its visually distinctive Jakarta; and *Edge* constructs viscerally cosmopolitan relationships through its spatial links between character encounters in Turkey and Germany. The prevalence of these encounters and relationships and their construction of the theme of network community amongst this wide international variety of case studies indicates that the motif of character encounters spatialise places in generic ways in network films. The next section considers the ultimate effects to which the films take these connections, styles and thematic messages, as it investigates whether or not the films’ representations of space in their closing scenes work generically.

**Spaces of Closure and Convergence**

This final section considers the various ways in which the films spatially represent narrative closure. I have observed and scholars have noted that certain audiovisual motifs recur in the seven films’ endings, suggesting that they comprise semantic and syntactic qualities. For one, Wesley Beal notes that the crowd, a large group of strangers who occupy the same public space, is a key visual and narrative motif in network films (2009, 405). Characters often unknowingly cross paths in the middle of crowds. And Azcona notes that

> [e]ndings in which the camera pulls back to move from the individual to the general and to extreme long shots (overhead or not) of buildings, streets, cities, or landscapes close the films with similar general statements. (2010, 43; see also 78)
Azcona also notes that montage sequences are often used at the end of multi-protagonist films (44). I suggest that, in addition to the motifs of crowds and long shots, the trope of closing montage sequences, while not in all network films, may be considered as a frequently used syntactic element. Montages are frequently used to connect characters in particular shared moments. These are often accompanied by a single musical theme which enhances the sense of characters’ connectivity. Final montages and closing scenes in these films often convey a sense of the cyclic or ongoing existence of networks beyond the narrative’s borders. They often impregnate the urban space with a sense of potential for communal and cosmopolitan bonds in contrast to their prospects of alienation. A further case can be made that some of the seven network films invert the dichotomy between urban space as alienating and rural space as idyllic, as Lantana shows the Australian landscape to be unsettling (see Duncanson 2009) and in Crash the wilderness is treated as a dumping ground for Peter’s corpse. However, not all of the seven films convey such rural/urban relationships, so for reasons of length I do not pursue the matter further. Sticking close to the topic of network community, this section investigates how the films depict space as communal during their closing scenes, in order to determine whether these endings are conveyed generically.

Mumbai’s point of closure neatly collates the character trajectories and conveys a strong sense of closure and spatial synchronisation. The film exhibits a final montage which shows all the characters and the whole city stopping their movements to honour the two minutes’ memorial silence for the train bombings’ victims. During this montage Rupali and Thomas are proximate as Thomas rides his bike into a square where Rupali and other people have stopped to mourn the victims. Nikhil, Suresh and Patil respectively remain in the public environments of the train, coffee house and police station respectively. This focus on public spaces in the final moments spatially unites the characters as citizens. Toward the end of this scene a non-diegetic song starts playing and continues into the closing credits. The song’s lyrics include the following:

Life in this city is so difficult
Be careful buddy, this is my darling Bombay …
You can find everything here but not a heart …
There are loots, plunder, starvation and sorrows …
Cutting each other’s throats is called business here …
Tell the world, don’t act so innocently!
As you sow, so shall you reap, that’s the rule here
Efforts are never respected here
This is Bombay, this is Bombay, this is Bombay my darling
life in this city is so easy.

These lyrics speak of Bombay being a complex city full of corruption but also beauty, as the singer proclaims how much he loves the city despite its faults. The song, named “Bombay Meri Jaan” or “Aei Dil Hai Mushkil Jeena Yahaan”, sung by Mohammed Rafi and Geeta Dutt and created by veteran film composer O.P. Nayyar and lyricist Majrooh Sultanpuri, is taken from a 1956 film C.I.D. (Khosla). C.I.D. also takes up controversial themes, showing corruption in politics, the police force, and their effects upon journalism. The song’s ironic lyrics thus suit Mumbai’s critique of police corruption, media sensationalism and social inequalities. Yet in counterpoint to the final scene which both mourns the bomb victims and celebrates the “spirit” of Mumbai (“Taglines for Mumbai” 2012), the song’s lyrics shed the impact of their critique as the film’s impetus rests on the positive message. The song has been similarly used in other films such as Teri Meri Kahaani (Kohli 2012) to herald Bombay/Mumbai as a glorious city. Mumbai emphasises temporal and spatial synchrony and places the narrative pleasure of recognising the network and the various characters’ moments of catharsis above the displeasure of asynchrony and social unease. Although the settings and certain encounters highlight their inequalities, the final scene and accompanying song intimate a social cohesion under the city’s name despite the extant inequalities. As illustrated in relation to character stereotypes, discussed in Chapter Three, this conclusion effectively reinstates a hierarchy between the characters based on their class and gender identities. Despite the song’s message of Mumbai’s ongoing conflicts, viewers come away from the film with a renewed sense of synchrony and network community, undermining the film’s initial critique of socio-spatial inequalities. Mumbai clearly illustrates the type of concluding montage and depiction of space that Azcona (44) and Beal (2009, 405) describe as prominent in network films.

Whereas Mumbai’s conclusion places a strong emphasis on public space, the spaces in which Crash’s characters ultimately realise and reflect on their moments of redemption and the spaces in which the film restores order are notably domestic. Crash does not use a final brief montage but does project a series of short scenes detailing the ends of characters’ stories. Cameron’s moment of reflection on his and Christine’s fight comes after redemptively defending Anthony as he spends time at the bonfire of Tom’s car (in which Tom shot Peter). This is an open space which physically links Cameron to
the narrative threads of Tom and Peter. During this scene we see youths flinging rubbish onto the bonfire and dancing around it. Cameron does not interact with them. Instead, the soundtrack’s bittersweet music imbues the scene with a cathartic atmosphere and he receives a phone call, shown to be “Home calling”. He answers, telling Christine he loves her. In effect, Cameron’s public encounters with the strangers Anthony and Peter lead to the resolution of a private and domestic conflict. Jean’s narrative arc also originates in the public domain with the mugging, the crowded house and the locksmith, but reconciles in the domestic, as she embraces her maid. Daniel, seen first at Jean’s house, embraces his daughter and wife after Farhad’s attack, and enters his house. Farhad returns to his own daughter and wife in the shop. The last image of John shows him helping his father at the toilet in their apartment. And Christine waits at home for Cameron. In these cases, resolution is found in the return to domestic and family environments.

In contrast to these resolutions, at the end of Crash when Grahame discovers his younger brother’s dead body, his family is torn apart, as his mother blames him for Peter’s death. Yet even with this tragic outcome, Grahame’s familial life is foregrounded. Tom’s open ended conclusion after dumping Peter’s body and disposing of the car is not domestically centred, but does fulfil John’s prediction that Tom would become racist (see Chapter Three 96-7). This contributes a sense of inevitability to the narrative closure. And Anthony’s cosmopolitan act of releasing the illegal immigrants he finds in the back of Ken Ho’s van draws a communal connection between the generations of immigrants with whom Los Angeles is populated (Prendergast 2007, 348). So while Crash at times transforms public, private and domestic spaces into ones of conflict that in various ways form communal bonds (through character parallels and through active cooperation), it nevertheless resolves by reinscribing most of its characters within their domestic relationships and spaces. In doing so, it retracts the visceral quality of its cosmopolitan relationships, promoting network community as a vision to be seen from behind closed doors, rather than one to actively participate in and pursue in public space.

Stylistically, Crash’s final scenes render Los Angeles as a place which can be viewed omnisciently in a way which neatly totalises the society. The bonfire and the Christmas season snow which falls at the end of the film are motifs which qualify the city as organic and mysterious. The aerial shot which cranes up, ascending to show
snow falling across the skyline, concludes the film with an omniscient perspective (Figures 6.18, 6.19).

Figure 6.18 Figure 6.19

As noted in Chapter Five (165-6), the closing non-diegetic song “Maybe Tomorrow” performed by Stereophonics (2003) emphasises the word “home.” Enhancing the way the characters’ encounters have been arranged to offset each others’ anger and offer each other opportunities for redemption (see Chapter Three), the song offers the hope that despite the violence there is comforting closure waiting ahead (see Chapter Five). Crash naturalises the narrative conflicts and infers that they are inherent and timeless elements of society rather than conflicts which arise from institutional and particular historical relationships. Since the connections between characters appear random but increasingly symmetrical, fortuitous and significant, the cityscape which accommodates these encounters is shown in a redeeming light along with the characters’ points of closure. While this portrait to some extent critiques and whittles away at the common concept of Los Angeles as a “fortress city” (Davis 1992, 154), it ultimately reinstates and naturalises segregated spaces. It regresses from exploring the political potential of intercultural encounters and blurred public and private spaces, retreating back to privileging familial and/or domestic relationships and spaces. Although it does not use a concluding montage as does Mumbai, Crash does conclude by visually accenting and speculating on the city’s role in connecting characters in a networked community. Crash, similar to Mumbai, concludes with a scene which re-establishes and endears the city of Los Angeles and its citizens as a network community. Although it does not use a montage, showing that final montages are not an indispensable generic component, Crash’s conclusion and closure adds weight to the argument that the ultimate concentration on the theme of network community is a semantic and syntactic element of network films.
**Lantana**’s final sequence mixes ambiguity with finality. Akin to *Crash* and *Code Unknown*, by the end of *Lantana* characters remain differentiated and distanced by their domestic and/or intimate spaces. Spatially, *Lantana*’s concluding montage segregates the characters, showing all except Claudia to occupy their own personal spaces, uncertain of their neighbours, lovers and selves. We see characters becoming accustomed to their future prospects and considering the events they have endured throughout the film. Patrick stands in the rain forlornly watching his lover eat with his family, peace seems restored to Paula and Nik as they relax on their lawn, Jane dances alone in her lounge room wearing a dressing gown holding a drink and a cigarette, Claudia finally meets and presumably has a pleasant dinner with her crush, John looks out, grief stricken, yet self-composed, over the Blue Mountains, and Sonya and Leon dance warily with each other, uncertain of the future of their marriage.

However, similar to *Crash*’s totalising viewpoint, some of the aspects of the closing scene compromise *Lantana*’s polyphony. The fact that the film does not cut between characters but instead uses dissolves to pass from one thread to the next in this scene, and the fact that Celia Cruz’s rendition of “Te Busco” (“I’m Looking for You”, 1993) is used throughout the montage temporally synchronises these characters. Furthermore, the blue and green tone of the natural light used in the film (Capp 2002) across each of these spaces homogenises them, portraying the city as a space in which numerous different people all suffer from similar feelings of distrust. Sitting halfway between the wordless communication of drumming in *Code Unknown* (discussed below) and the cathartic lyrics of the final songs in *Crash* and *Mumbai*, the Spanish song in *Lantana* reiterates the theme of Australia’s multicultural identity. Singing of love (recalling the dance instructor’s admonition to Leon that the tango is a dance about sexual passion), the song unites the characters, acoustically carrying on the theme of the introduced South American plant lantana’s presence in Australia. Its foreignness emphasises the film’s themes of the continuing tensions of in/migration, colonisation and multiculturalism in Australia. *Lantana*’s final montage, like that of *Code Unknown*, underscores the ambiguity, failure and only in two cases potentially hopeful outcomes of the connections made during the film. Each character is now in a state of estrangement to one another, and even Claudia’s date is with a stranger. Yet now that the mystery of the body in the bushes has been solved, the song’s foreign influence sums up the uncertainties and strangeness of all the characters’ emotional landscapes. Much like the conclusion of *Crash*, the characters disconnect from their neighbours and
people they have met during the film and return to similar relationships as seen at the film’s outset. *Lantana* thus concludes by reinstating a type of spatial segregation, but synchronises the characters’ emotional experiences and unites them in their strangeness. Using the common motif of the final montage, similar to *Mumbai* and *Crash*, *Lantana* syntactically constructs the theme of network community across its social cross section and thereby unites its spatial settings.

Being differently structured to the other films, *Edge* does not feature a final montage which gathers characters together. Yet it does stress the potential for space that brings people together in forms of network community. Notably, the film’s German title translates as “On the Other Side”. At the end Nejat stands looking out towards the Black Sea, on whose other side rest Ukraine, Russia and Romania, similar “constitutive others” (see Silvey and Hillman 2010, 112) to Europe as is Turkey. Since the film has steadily connected people across borders, this setting suggests that further links lie over the water. This scene is open-ended since we do not know whether Ali will appear. This resonates differently to the closure of other films like *Lantana* and *Crash*, since it does not sum up the characters’ fates but leaves them uncertain. To a degree this open-endedness offsets the neat pairing of Ayten and Susanne in the preceding scenes, since if Ali and Nejat were to reunite this would conclusively pair off the characters. However, the future of the characters remains unpredictable, unlike the neat closure and returns to the familiar in *Lantana*, *Crash* and *Babel*. Thus, while the films do not all share the semantic element of montages, they do so far appear to share a syntax of network community that is conveyed in their closing physical spaces. In the closure of *Edge*, given the ongoing connections and missed connections during the film, the concept of network community is stressed as a visceral (Bergfelder 2010), ever-broadening process.

*Love* ultimately de-emphasises asynchrony in favour of highlighting the characters’ parallels, unifying them in space and simultaneity and conveying a strong sense of optimistic closure. In the final scene Ming is forced to move from the trendily retro-decorated apartment Koh Abun paid for to the same suburb as Siti escapes from, showing that the characters move in similar ways and suggesting that the neighbourhood offers multiple possibilities regarding polygamy (Figure 6.20). Ming aids Siti and Dwi’s escape as they take the taxi she has just vacated upon arriving in the neighbourhood. She also gives a teddy bear to Dwi’s daughter, symbolising a communal bond as discussed in Chapter Four (131) (Figure 6.21). In this scene the
bright colours typically associated with Ming are toned down to suit the yellows and browns we already associate with this area in Siti’s segment.

These connections create a syntax of connection and community between the network characters, emphasising a happy ending as the women find liberation from their husbands. This and the characters’ physical intersections frame Jakarta through their different experiences. This framing interestingly visualises a degree of asynchrony between spaces. However, the connections and encounters between the women show a positive network community in contrast to the open-endedness of Edge’s character constellation. Nevertheless, as in Edge, the ongoing connections between characters throughout lead to the film’s ultimate implication that women around Jakarta and elsewhere experience similar problems although, unlike Edge, Love’s circle of characters is a closed one. Love finally conveys an authorially cohesive message. It is with relish that Ming in the second last scene mounts her “Home Sweet Home” sign on her door and closes it to us, retreating from polygamous relationships, re-establishing her privacy and concluding her story. After this, a final handheld tracking shot up the alleyway past other closed doors suggests the unpredictability and individuality of Jakarta’s occupants. Yet as a whole the film binds its characters together in its unifying theme of their liberation from polygamy. Such an emphasis on spatial and thematic synchrony is thereby similar to that seen in Edge, Lantana, Mumbai and Crash. This indicates that while a closing montage is not an ever-present generic aspect, the emphasis on the theme of network community as a spatially contingent force is a key syntactic element to network films.

Despite its spatial distances and the diversity of characters’ threads, Babel ultimately endorses a totalising monologic view. As discussed in Chapter Five, a strong sense of synchrony and closure is provided in the final four scenes in which we see the
conclusions for Amelia, the Moroccan boys, Richard and Susan and lastly Chieko. The fact that these scenes spatially resettle characters in their native countries and familiar environments enhances *Babel*’s synchrony and closure. A sustained piece of minor key music played on an oud, a stringed instrument popular in North Africa and the Middle East (Shaw 2011, 16), bridges each of these scenes, and continues partway into the final scene. Despite the film’s efforts to stress the unfair inequalities between countries, its closure mitigates this. *Babel*, similar to *Crash*, uses a zoom out in its final scene to suggest the sublime enormity of the world and yet connectedness of the people within it. The final scene shows Chieko, naked, standing on the balcony when her father arrives home. He goes out to stand with her, comfortingly embracing her as they stand amidst the overwhelming multitude of Tokyo’s night sky and surrounding apartments. The zoom out reflects the complexity of the city. Its sense of closure prompts the viewer to consider how the characters from elsewhere all connect to one another and experience similar feelings, trauma and consolations to that of Chieko and her father. In the latter moments of this final scene, new music begins which is unlike earlier oud piece. This final music uses a tonally deeper and richer piano and cello combination. As the camera zooms out, the fuller volume and sombre, tragic tone of this piece indicates that it is closing the film and speaking for all the characters, not just Chieko and her father. This transition from the intimate to the sublime grants us space in which to contemplate the complexity of the tangle of life, not just that of Tokyo but of the whole world (Figure 6.22).
As discussed in Chapter Three (92-3), *Babel*’s narrative politics reinstate problematic narrative politics which favour an Americentric character hierarchy and which undermine its depth of social critique. As in *Edge, Mumbai, Love, Lantana* and *Crash, Babel* focuses on connections made across different spaces and across the characters’ different experiences. These totalising gestures undermine the film’s complexity. Although *Babel* uses spatial and temporal asynchrony in order to articulate the global disjunctures between characters, it resolves its narrative spatially by suggesting that endless connections like these populate the world. *Babel*’s use of space is therefore akin to the spatial synchronisations and naturalisations of *Crash, Lantana, Mumbai* and to some extents *Love*. It too muses on the characters’ connectivity while returning them to domestic spaces which reinstates geographic and socioeconomic borders (in contrast, in *Love*’s case the acquisition of private domestic spaces, occurring alongside ventures into public space, signals a retort to gender inequalities). In *Babel*’s case this return to domestic space fails to substantially represent any permanent transgression of space which would offer some radical possibilities for a communal network society. On the whole, along with each of the films so far discussed, *Babel*’s spatial closure similarly articulates a theme of network community, lending conviction to the claim that this aspect is semantic and syntactic.

In *Code Unknown*’s final scene characters do not encounter one another directly, but a montage nevertheless connects them. This montage has been described in Chapters Four (126-7) and Five (151-3), and I return to it once more to discuss its spatiality. This montage emphasises characters’ experiential distances to one another. The evictions of Maria and Georges from their respective familiar spaces underscore the disjunctures of private space. The public drumming concert of Amadou’s deaf students perform during these scenes mark such disjunctures as ongoing, perpetual (in conjunction with the perpetual motion and sound of the drummers) and embattled (Figure 6.23).
Although Anne and Georges’ scenes are situated nearby Maria’s, we do not see them pass one another, and the cuts to black in between their scenes accentuate their experiential distances despite their spatial proximity. Yet Cameron argues that the final montage, in collecting the characters aurally and with a degree of simultaneity, “fosters a sense of community, however abstract or tenuous” (2008, 167). This is a crucial point, as even in such a polyphonic film the motif of network community is still produced. Drumming here strongly connotes communication (Sharrett 2006, 14), although the cuts to black also suggest that any hope of communication between the characters is precarious, as does the epilogue showing the children unsuccessfully signing to one another. The spaces of Code Unknown’s encounters and final montage highlight social problems and continuing inequalities. Despite these inequalities, the characters’ proximity to one another nevertheless conjures up the motif of network community to end the film. So although Code Unknown’s narrative politics often differ from the other six films, it does contain a final montage as do Mumbai, Lantana, and Crash, and as do all the other of the seven films its final scenes strongly dwell on the theme and spatialisation of network community. This indicates that the spatialisation of a theme of network community is a generic syntactic component of each of the case studies.

The seven films differ in their stylistic approaches to concluding scenes and narrative closure. This shows that although devices such as montages and zooms out are common as Azcona and Beal describe, they are not essential semantic generic aspects. However, it is clear from this analysis that the seven films each use their diegetic spaces, geographies, and narratives to contemplate the existence of network community in their final scenes. This use of space does indicate a generic aspect, a syntax of closure that
emphasises their key generic theme of the potential for network community. Each of the films’ concluding scenes contains differences in the extent to which they valorise or question network community and render space coherent or not. *Code Unknown*’s final montage provides the most ambiguous message yet its soundtrack helps to spatially connect its characters. *Lantana* and *Mumbai* use montages, with their soundtracks and transitions also helping to convey connectedness – *Lantana* illustrating the fragility of characters’ relationships and *Mumbai* conveying the redemption patriotism and collective mourning brings to its community. While not using a montage, *Edge*’s spatial setting emphasises the theme of transnational connections and complements the open-endedness of its character constellations. *Love, Crash* and *Babel* each conclude with a zoom out, the latter two aerially surveying cityscapes. These three films thus emphasise the complexity of the societies shown, offering a vision of dense networks of connections continuing beyond the narrative frames. These seven films thereby use a common syntax in their representation of space and themes in their closing scenes.

**Chapter Conclusion**

As well as aspects of themes, characterisation, time and stylistic motifs which relate to network theory and the network society paradigm, city space is a key factor of network films that frames themes of network community. On the whole, although the seven network films attend to different spaces in distinct ways, they use common thematic and stylistic elements. Firstly, a semantic aspect is that the films are set in iconic cities and spaces which are portrayed through localised perspectives that in turn present cognitive maps of how characters are connected throughout the spaces. Secondly, characters’ uses of spaces semantically and syntactically blur local and in some cases international boundaries between class, racial, public and private divisions. This blurring of borders represents urban space as potentially redemptive and communal instead of alienating and segregated. Thirdly, character encounters in public and private spaces also form a key semantic and syntactic element which contributes significantly to themes of network community. And fourthly, the films’ depiction of space and characters’ spatial relationships in their concluding scenes reiterates the distinctive syntactic element of network community. Although the seven films portray differently the disjunctures, spatial and temporal asynchronies, and characters’ experiences as regulated by their spatial environments, they nevertheless consistently concentrate on spatial settings and relationships in order to represent and consider whether the notion
of network community is viable. This use of space illustrates that network films can be considered a genre, along with their generic elements of common topics, character types, character parallelism, and their representation of time. In conjunction with the preceding chapters, this chapter has found that network films can justifiably be considered a genre in terms of their narrative devices. The following chapter considers the extra-textual conditions of the seven case studies’ production and distribution in order to see whether they are conceived as a genre and to introduce a discussion of how they relate to the conditions and notions of world cinema.
Chapter Seven: Production Backgrounds and Distribution

So far, we have seen how the seven case studies share generic narrative practices. They have common topics, represent characters in consistent ways, share stylistic elements, and they convey temporality and spatiality in ways which similarly centre around the theme of network community. In order to conclusively answer the question of whether we can describe network films as a genre, indeed a global one, this chapter explores whether the films are being produced in acknowledgement of each other. It compares their production backgrounds and their methods of distribution in order to ascertain whether the films are being marketed as a genre. This insight into their production backgrounds and consideration of how they were categorically described upon reception prepares the ground for the final chapter’s discussion of how these films relate to notions of world cinema.

Are the Directors Thinking of Network Films as a Genre?

In Chapter One (20-1) I described how commentators are thinking of network films as a genre. There is also strong evidence to show that the creators of the films, most prominently the directors, writers, and producers, are thinking of them as such. Genre has often been understood to indicate the narrative formulas that certain industries repeatedly produce. As noted earlier, Rick Altman describes this as “genre as blueprint, as a formula that precedes, programmes and patterns industry production” (1999, 14). He goes on to write that

Genres are often created or reinforced as by-products of industrial imitation. Seeking to equate their films with the brand names they imitate, clone producers typically employ generic terms reducing both originals and clones to the same common denominator. (122)

In relation to network films something similar to this trend is reflected in the fact that the same director (Garry Marshall), writer (Katherine Fugate), production studio (New Line Cinema) and producers (Samuel J. Brown, Michael Disco, Heather Hall, Mike Karz, Diana Pokorny, Wayne Allan Rice and Josie Rosen) made both network films

36 Auteur theory sits alongside genre theory as a type of classification. Some of the directors of the seven case studies – namely Haneke, Akin, Di Nata, and Inárritu – have acquired recognition as auteurs. However, since this is a genre study I do not address this aspect further.
Valentine’s Day and New Year’s Eve. They seem to have found a formula on which to capitalise, going so far as to cast some of the same actors in both films.

The multiple network films of directors Robert Altman, Alejandro Gonzalez Inárritu and Michael Haneke also suggest that such films are possibly being produced and thought of at the creative level as genre films. As noted earlier, Robert Altman is often described as one of the key founders of the network format, with many of his films such as Nashville and Short Cuts using ensemble casts and loose connections between characters (Bordwell 2008a, 221-2; Azcona 8). Prior to making Babel and Code Unknown respectively, Inárritu and Haneke had directed other films with similar structures and thematic concerns. Inárritu made 21 Grams and Amores Perros, the similarities of which (including Babel) have been discussed in depth in Tierney (2009), and to a lesser extent in both Smith (2003) and Hahn (2005). And Haneke’s 71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance shows loosely linked stories of various people set in a bleak European city, similar to Code Unknown (Grossvogel 2007, 37, 39-40). The fact that these directors make use of similar narrative structures and themes multiple times indicates that, as with Altman’s films, the network structure and thematics are being treated not simply as an experiment but as a particular framework with accompanying meanings. Altman’s films from the 1970s right up until the early 2000s are clearly extremely influential upon the recent bout of network films. However, since others have already detailed this fact and since I am focusing on films which concentrate on geopolitical concerns of the late 1990s onwards I do not analyse his films or influence any further here and will simply point to others’ work on it (see Azcona 8; Bordwell 2008a, 221-2). These examples of the films’ creators approaching network films as a type of formula lead me to ask if the creators of the case studies are treating them as a genre.

In interviews, many of the seven films’ directors and writers have been asked which films inspired them to make their films. Crash’s director Paul Haggis answers “It’s obvious to anyone who has seen Crash that I owe a huge debt to Robert Altman” (Haggis 2006). In another interview Haggis describes the process of writing Crash, saying that “When we were done, I still didn’t know if we had a movie because it didn’t follow any of the rules I knew. I mean, not that I invented this, I stole liberally from Robert Altman!” (Total Film 2006). Haggis clearly positions Crash within a well-established body of network films, principally those of Altman. This statement is
interesting though because despite claiming *Crash* does not follow any rules he knew previously, he infers that Altman is the “owner” of the rules he “stole” for *Crash*. In genre terms, this infers that Haggis sees particular semantics and syntaxes, or “rules”, at work in Altman’s films. He describes Altman as having

changed the art of making movies. He did much more than teach us how to tell a compelling story from multiple perspectives. He embraced chaos like no director before him… Think of how *M*A*S*H* oozed cynicism while celebrating life, how *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* and *Gosford Park* intermingled evil and innocence, how much love he showed for the disdainful characters in *Nashville, The Player*, and a half-dozen other films. (Haggis 2006)

In this description of the qualities of Altman’s films, it appears that the treatment of chaos, complexity and intermingling of contrasting characters and themes are for Haggis the key aspects which characterise Altman’s works. As we saw in Chapters Two and Three, these qualities are those which this thesis has so far described in relation to social cross sections and chance connections in the seven case studies. As well as praising Altman’s narrative innovations, Haggis acknowledges another contemporary director who has significantly contributed to the recent proliferation of network films. In the above interview he describes visiting *Magnolia*’s director Paul Thomas Anderson, whom Haggis had “always wanted to meet” (Haggis 2006). Haggis’ praise for the two directors who are most often credited for the rise of network films over the past few decades shows that he actively thinks of network films as a group of similarly constructed works, perhaps even a genre.

In contrast to Haggis’ admiration for Altman and Anderson, Haneke acknowledges *Code Unknown*’s place amongst other network films but claims that it is more realistic than American examples. David Bordwell quotes Haneke’s statement:

> Although I find films like *Magnolia* and *Short Cuts* very well done, they use aesthetic means to present an illusion of totality that does not exist. In reality, our impressions are isolated. I present the fragments as they are. (Haneke 2006 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 221)

Importantly for the argument that network films constitute a genre, although he claims his films are more realistic, Haneke evidently thinks of his films *Code Unknown* and 71
Fragments as related to other network films. While they differ in many ways in their appreciation for the work of other directors, Haneke and Haggis both clearly consider their films as belonging to a body of various network films.

Another person to cite Altman as a key inspiration to the production of a network film is Andrew Bovell, the author of Lantana’s screenplay which he adapted from his play Speaking in Tongues ([1996] 2009). Speaking in Tongues has a three part structure, with the connections between characters becoming evident in the latter parts of the play, similar to the revelations in Love and Edge. In an interview discussing his adaptation of the play into a screenplay, Bovell confesses:

I’ve always been interested in the multi-narrative structure, ever since I first saw Robert Altman’s work. The form is now more common...I wanted it to be an ensemble film where we can explore other characters deeply, not just have them as tools for the leads and the action. (Bovell qtd. in Urban 2001)

As does Haggis, Bovell makes clear that Altman’s network films were an inspiration for Lantana, and notes that he is aware of the contemporary popularity of this style of filmmaking and narrative. This interview also notes that Bovell had a part in the editing process (Urban 2001), illustrating that this admiration for Altman’s network films was also carried on into the film’s creation even beyond the scripted stage. Lantana’s conception and execution was evidently achieved within a consciousness of network films as a group of films.

When asked about his inspirations for Edge, Fatih Akin states that Iñárritu’s 21 Grams was one (Beddies 2007). He states claims he has seen “many movies that have a great approach, but fail on average, like Babel” (Beddies 2007). Akin cites an inability to emotionally connect with the characters as Babel’s key failure and explains that in structuring Edge as a triptych rather than a jumbled narrative he hoped to avoid such a fault (Beddies 2007). In a different interview he is asked whether he was inspired by the films of the Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski. Kieslowski’s Three Colours: Red is a network film and is the third part of the Three Colours trilogy, the whole of which

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37 Further implications of such a contrast in Haneke’s approach and his critique of the American examples are explored in Chapter Eight (257-9).

38 In another interview, Akin states that he is more influenced by Arriaga than Iñárritu and reveals that he is a friend of Arriaga’s, indicating that he has chosen Arriaga’s side in an infamous rift between Arriaga and Iñárritu that occurred after the release of Babel (Keough 2008).
contains network narrative elements. Kieslowski’s set of ten short films, *The Decalogue* (1988-) also contain network motifs such as central characters who reappear as minor ones in different narrative strands. Akin responded that

Many people have compared it to Kieslowski and I have to admit I’ve never seen his films. Except *A Short Film about Killing* [1988] and *A Short Film About Love* [1988] [both belong to the Decalogue]…But I haven’t seen the [Three Colours] trilogy. (Keough 2008)

Later in this interview Akin directly states his awareness of network films as a type of genre, stating that “we have this modern form of narrative structure like with Tarantino”. Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*, with its jumbled plot and intersecting narrative threads, is often considered as one of the key instigators of the contemporary boom in network films (Berg 2006, 5; Denby 2007; Bordwell 2008a, 197). Akin thereby acknowledges that *Edge* contributes to this group of films, which he describes as a “modern form”. Akin, similar to Haneke, is clearly aware of network films as a body of films.

It is also significant that Akin had originally planned *Edge* to be “more chronological” and intercut between characters’ stories (Pyramide Vidéo 2007). In discussing the decision to present the film as a triptych, Akin explains that he did not want it to be confusing or have “gimmicks” like other network films which intercut between threads (Pyramide Vidéo 2007). It is important that Akin here refers to *Edge*’s likeness to jumbled plot network films even though he eventually decided to use a triptych structure. This shows that, aside from their structure, Akin is aware of multiple likenesses between network films such as the multiple characters and themes. He also clearly identifies these films as a group, further indicating that directors of the seven case studies are conceiving of network films as one would a genre.

Iñárritu, to whose film *Babel* Akin referred above, also acknowledges the influence of other network narratives on his work. Discussing his network film *Amores Perros*, Iñárritu was asked his opinion of Tarantino’s work. Iñárritu states “I like the way he plays with structure - but I don’t know why he gets the credit. It’s really William Faulkner; it’s a literary structure that has existed for a long time” (Romney 2000). Elsewhere Iñárritu similarly states:
This is nothing new, what I do – *Rashomon* [sic], sixty years ago, played with structure and time ... My father is a great story teller, he starts in the middle and goes back and forth, and that’s an entertaining way to tell a story. My aunt tells a linear story, I want to fall asleep, waiting for the end, which I already know ... I normally construct my thoughts like that – I jump around a lot. (Philbin 2007)

Iñárritu thereby situates his films within a long set of textual precedents and natural thought processes which have influenced contemporary network films. Iñárritu’s awareness of network films as a group is less evident in interviews, with surprisingly little mention of films such as *Magnolia* or directors such as Haneke, Paul Thomas Anderson or Robert Altman. This is a curious factor considering such comparisons are asked of and/or made by Haggis, Akin and Haneke, whose success and/or fame with network films have been comparable to Iñárritu’s. Yet Iñárritu and Arriaga clearly draw from and acknowledge literary and filmic conditions which inspire network narratives, suggesting that they too conceive of these films as a genre.

Searches for interviews in English with the directors of *Love* and *Mumbai* turn up very little direct mention of influences such as Altman, Anderson, Akin, Tarantino, Kurosawa, or Kieslowski, or terms such as ensemble films, network films, or hyperlink cinema. Nevertheless, in interviews the directors and scriptwriters of these two films have noted that their influences include filmmakers and films that use complex narratives and network narratives. In a 2012 interview conducted by Neha K. Kulkarni, Upendra Sidhaye, the scriptwriter and assistant director of *Mumbai*, lists his favourite movies as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *The Godfather* (Coppola 1972), and *Satya* (Varma 1998). Sidhaye claims a favourite screenplay/story writer is Charlie Kaufman – who wrote *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Being John Malkovich* (Jonze 1999) and *Adaptation* (Jonze 2002). And he reveals that his favourite directors are Christopher Nolan (*Memento*) and Jaideep Sahni (*Company* [2002], *Khosla Ka Ghosla* [2006], *Chak De! India* [2007]). All of these films and creators are known for their puzzle narratives (see Chapter One 13-5). Such influences offer the possibility that the creators of *Mumbai* are aware of other network films, particularly since other network films have appeared locally in India in recent years (for example, *Life in a Metro* [Basu 2007]; and to a lesser extent the ensemble films *Dil Chahta Hai* [Akhtar 2001] and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kahna* [Johar, 2006]). This suggests that the creators of *Mumbai* conceive of it as a part of a genre or a near generic grouping.
Love’s director Nia Di Nata lists her favourite directors as “Pedro Almodovar [sic], Mira Nair, Rebecca Miller, Zhang Yi Mou, [and] Alfonzo Cuarón [sic]” (Tehrani 2007). Di Nata thereby demonstrates that she has a wide range of influences from around the world. Because she is evidently familiar with a large variety of international directors’ works and because she studied at universities in America during the early 1990s (Pennsylvania and New York, from the late 1980s or early 1990s until 1995 [Ibrahim 2012]), it is possible that Di Nata is aware of Love being similar in structure and other ways to network narratives. During her time in America such multi-protagonist and network films as Magnolia, Short Cuts, City of Hope (Sayles 1991), Singles (Crowe 1992), the Three Colours trilogy, and Pulp Fiction were released. As Chapter Eight discusses, multiple network narratives have also begun to appear in Indonesia in recent years. The lack of attention to Love’s structure in interviews with Di Nata may also be due to the extremely controversial nature of the subject matter of polygamy. This is a topic reviews focus on, leaving little time for discussions of the film’s other elements. While it is possible that Di Nata thinks of network films as a genre, this remains an open question.

Although the evidence is unclear whether the creators of Mumbai and Love deliberately drew inspiration from other network films, as noted in Chapter One (21-2) there is clear indication in popular discourse that viewers see them as interrelated. Looking at the popular medium of online platforms, copious reviews of Mumbai and Love compare them to other network films (Kanwar c.2008; cinefreak c.2008; Kamal66 2007). These non-academic reviews respond to the films as a collection of comparable texts, similar to those academic articles discussed earlier (see Chapter One 21-5; Imanjaya 2009). Mumbai is compared to non-linear and/or multi-protagonist Indian films such as Life in a Metro (Basu 2007), Om Shanti Om (Khan 2007), LSD: Love Sex aur Dhokha (Banerjee 2010), and Dhobi Ghat (Rao 2010) (Duara 2011; “Telugu” 1999), as well as to non Indian examples such as Crash, Magnolia and Babel (Kanwar c.2008; cinefreak [c. 2008]). One review (Duara 2011) cites influences or prototypes for these types of stories such as the Sanskrit epic The Mahabharata (1933-1966), Tolstoy’s War and Peace ([1869] 1925), and films such as Wings of Desire (Wenders 1987), The Longest Day (Annakin et al. 1962), Battle of Britain (Hamilton 1969), and Tora! Tora! Tora! (Fleischer et al. 1970). Di Nata’s Love is also compared to Iñárritu’s films (Imanjaya 2009). These influences and cross-pollinations illustrate the contemporary
global flows of cinema which have clearly resulted in the widespread recognition of network films as a particular body of comparable films.

In this section I discussed how writers, directors, and reviewers of the seven films evidently regard these works as part of a particular group of films. Aside from the seven case study films, there are many instances of writers and directors of network films talking about them as a particular group or genre of cinema (see Shields 2007; Brooks 2003; R. Williams 2000; Tallerico 2009). In the next chapter I further tease out the implications that such critiques and comparisons between directors and reviewers have for the concept of world cinema. The perception of network films at the production stage as a common, international group of films lends weight to the claim that in their production as well as their narratives, network films represent a genre.

Are the Films Marketed as a Genre?

As noted earlier, genre is often described as having a close relation to the ways in which companies market films. Advertising material may emphasise the films’ likenesses or connections to certain films and directors, or may, for instance, use similar iconography. Steve Neale notes this when he writes that “[t]he indication of relevant generic characteristics is … one of the most important functions that advertisements, stills, reviews and posters perform” (1990, 49). Neale argues that the images used in film posters often visually signal a film’s generic status (49). At the same time, talking of the linguistic messages used in Hollywood film advertising, Rick Altman draws attention to the fact that

At every turn, we find that Hollywood labours to identify its pictures with multiple genres, in order to benefit from the increased interest that this strategy inspires in diverse demographic groups. (1999, 57)

Thus, while posters and advertisements may use “generic images” (Neale 1990, 49), and may contain phrases such as “from the producers who brought you X” or “X meets Y”, it is unlikely that they would state “a thriller very similar to X” or “a comedy just like Y”. In order to attract audiences they often advertise films’ originality within a familiar field, such as “a comedy like no other”, as well as a film’s unique combination of different genre qualities. Such tactics reassure consumers that the film offers something familiar but also new. Looking at the visual and linguistic messages of the posters and
promotional material for network films thus helps me to identify whether or not they are being marketed as a genre.

From their promotional material it is clear that network films are marketed in comparable fashions. One striking element of this is the fact that posters for network
films visually highlight the “mosaic” nature of their star ensembles using “tiling” effects. Tiling effects manifest differently but generally feature multiple fragmentary images. For instance, some posters for *Babel* (Figure 7.1), *Love* (Figure 7.2), and *Edge* (Figure 7.3) are divided into three or more horizontal sections, with a close up on one central protagonist in each section. *Babel*’s middle sections are also divided in two vertically, allowing for six separate images (four of which are close ups of Brad Pitt, Cate Blanchett, Gael García Bernal and Rinko Kikuchi, the other two being long shots of city lights and congested traffic). Above and below these six rough squares are two panoramic shots of the Moroccan boys in the mountains and Amelia with the American children in the desert (Figure 7.1). Some posters such as those for *Lantana* (Figure 7.6) and *Crash* (Figure 7.5) similarly feature individual close ups of the actors placed horizontally along the top or bottom of the poster with an iconic scene from the film in the other half. *Mumbai*’s poster (Figure 7.4) features six separate close ups of the actors on a black background, with the title placed in large script above the images. One poster for *Code Unknown* only contains an image of Juliette Binoche in close up, but this image is pixellated so that her face appears blurred and made up of multiple squares (Figure 7.7). Binoche has been described as a representative of Europe, “the smiling face that ought to be on the Euro coin with which film business is done” because of her internationally recognised fame and beauty (Thomson 2003 qtd. in Wheatley 2009, 126). By pixellating her visage the poster symbolises a Europe divided, which its narrative thematically explores. Tiling effects are evidently popular in the promotion of network films, prominent in each of the seven films’ posters.

Tiling effects visually emphasise the theme of multiplicity and fragmentation within the films, showing that these stories follow multiple stars/characters and that they convey complexity. At the same time as visualising the thematic fragmentation and the individuality of the actors/characters, these fragmentary images are united upon the posters. The posters hold unifying elements as well as fractured ones. For instance, in *Crash* and *Lantana*’s posters (Figures 7.5, 7.6) the scenes from the films help to contextualise the characters as all being related to that image. *Babel*’s bold title running down the page, its uniform background colour and the symmetry of the images helps to unite and connect them (Figure 7.1). The posters for *Love* and *Edge* (Figures 7.2, 7.3) work in similar ways to *Babel*’s, with uniformly divided sections and close ups. Juliette Binoche’s face on the *Code Unknown* poster (Figure 7.7) is recognisable despite being blurry. And *Mumbai*’s poster (Figure 7.4) also unites its characters on a uniformly black
background with the actors all facing similar directions. These posters thus visually emphasise the network motif of multiple narrative strands that all connect.

Notably, this visual tiling effect has become common for films which do not use network narratives. The omnibus films *Paris, je t’aime* and *New York, I Love You* also use tiling effects, highlighting their multiple stories and different directors (in contrast to the single directors of network films). Films such as *A Mighty Heart* (Winterbottom, 2007; Figure 7.8), *Hairspray* (Shankman, 2007; Figure 7.9), *The Tree of Life* (Malick, 2011; Figure 7.10), *Red* (Schwentke, 2010) use tiling effects in their posters, although they are not network films. These films feature ensemble star casts of characters whose lives are closely rather than distantly connected. In the case of *A Mighty Heart* (Figure 7.8) and *The Tree of Life* (Figure 7.10) the tiling effects centre around multiple images of the central protagonists/actors (in the former Angelina Jolie and in the latter Brad Pitt and Jessica Chastain). The visual tiling effect in movie posters not only of network films but of ensemble films understandably banks on star appeal. These posters may be emulating a style closely associated with network films, yet if there is a clearer distinction between the ways in which network films are advertised compared to other films, we must look elsewhere. Nevertheless, the tiling effect is often used for network films, although it is not exclusive to them.

Other posters such as the more widely distributed ones for *Edge*, *Lantana* and *Code Unknown* which feature the central protagonists in prominent view from iconic scenes in the films help to emphasise the themes which run throughout the films’ narrative strands, respectively: uncertainty about the future with Nejat looking out to sea (Figure 7.11); uncertainty of the couple’s embrace and their emotional entanglement in
the moody blue shot of Leon and Sonya dancing with their faces hidden and weed-like shapes superimposed on the image (Figure 7.12); and shock, fear and entrapment in the image of Juliette Binoche screaming in the swimming pool (Figure 7.13). This promotional material thus emphasises these films as having key themes which run throughout them, just as the tiled effects unite their characters at the same time as emphasising their individuality. This is another common visual composition used for films of different genres. Although such visual motifs clearly emphasise the network elements and themes of the films, because they are so varied and not exclusive to network films it appears we must turn elsewhere to find out if network films are advertised as a genre.

Whereas the visual motifs of network film posters are clearly comparable and yet not exclusive to network films, their official websites, taglines and promotional messages provide certain markings of generic identification. Official websites and taglines for the films often use similar phrases and draw attention to comparable aspects of the films. Taglines, either messages written on the posters or key phrases used within advertisements for the seven network films are comparable. Once again, as Altman notes, genre films try to avoid being advertised as carbon copies, yet bank on the audience’s familiarity with the genre (1999, 57).

Network films’ websites and taglines describe their narratives and themes as complex and mysterious, accentuating the motif of secretive and/or unrealised connections between people. They also emphasise thematic motifs of the chance
connections between characters who are strangers, universality between people’s experiences, and the connections that globalisation brings about. Palace Films’ website for *Lantana* describes it as a “psychological drama”, but emphasises its network aspects stating “Four marriages are drawn into a tangled web of love, deceit, sex and death” and describing the mêlée as “a dark labyrinth of human relationships” (Palace Films 2011). *Lantana*’s taglines also emphasise the theme of complexity in its depiction of love, stating “love is the greatest mystery”. The warning “[i]t’s tangled” (“Taglines for Lantana” 2012) also hints at the connections between characters.

Similarly, emphasising characters’ networked connections, *Crash*’s official Lions Gate Entertainment website prominently features the phrase “moving at the speed of life, we are bound to collide with each other”. The site’s synopsis tells us that the characters “will all collide” and that

this compelling urban drama tracks the volatile intersections of a multi-ethnic cast of characters’ struggles to overcome their fears as they careen in and out of one another’s lives. (Lions Gate 2011, “Crash: Film Info”)

This synopsis also proclaims that *Crash* “ventures beyond color lines…and uncovers the truth of our shared humanity”. *Crash*’s taglines also emphasise the complexity of its social themes, stating “[i]t’s not like things are black and white”, and (using a line from the film) “[y]ou think you know who you are. You have no idea” (“Taglines for Crash” 2012).

*Babel*’s taglines emphasise the universality of its themes, stating “[t]ragedy is universal”, “[p]ain is universal ... But so is hope”, and “[i]f you want to be understood ... listen”. Its taglines also underscore the connectedness of its characters, with “[o]ne shot, many kills”, “[a] global disaster” and “[a] single gunshot heard around the world” (“Taglines for Babel” 2012). Paramount Pictures’ website for *Babel* labels its genre as “drama”, and displays the film’s almost identical theatrical and DVD trailers (2010). These trailers focus predominantly on Brad Pitt (suggesting he is the lynchpin character), have a voiceover describing the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, and imply that the four narrative threads are integrally interlinked. These audiovisual cues draw close attention to the interconnection of social cross sections and convey universal themes.
Edge’s official website, sponsored by Akin’s company Corazón International, also stresses the connection of its varied characters (Corazón International 2012, “Profile”). Its English synopsis states in a bold, all capitals font, “Linked by death, the fragile lives of six people connect on emotional journeys…” (Corazón International 2012, “The Edge of Heaven”).

Listed on the uniFrance website (2007-2012), a promotional company for French cinema, Code Unknown’s synopsis is phrased similarly to those of Edge and Crash. It reads “We follow the stories of these characters and the people they meet along the way. What do they have in common?”. Similar to Lantana’s implications of pluralistic and conflicting points of view on love, Code Unknown’s tagline also stresses the complexity of love and miscommunication, reading “[l]ove has a language all its own” (“Taglines for Code Unknown” 2012). This tagline recalls the themes of miscommunication in Babel’s tagline “[i]f you want to be understood ... listen”. These similarities between the films’ websites’ uses of language and taglines are evidence of the closely related discourse circulating around the films’ creation and promotion.

Neither Love nor Mumbai have current officially sponsored websites, although Mumbai has a poster image on its distribution company UTV’s website (2012). Love’s poster’s tagline “3 women. 1 destiny” (Figure 7.2) indicates the close relationship between the three strangers. And Mumbai’s tagline “Salute the Spirit of Bombay” (“Taglines for Mumbai” 2012) emphasises the city as a place of physical, spiritual and/or emotional connection. This bears comparison to the promotion and taglines of the other films discussed, such as Crash’s emphasis on Los Angeles and Code Unknown’s emphasis on Paris as iconic cities of connection.

Evidently these websites and taglines flag the common topics of social contrasts, chance encounters, and the themes of transcending barriers (Bordwell 2008a, 213, 200), “life as a whole” (Empson 1960 qtd. in Bordwell 2008a, 197), and network community (see Chapter Two). In their promotional material, these films commonly emphasise the distinctive network themes of the shared experiences of characters and the random connections between strangers. While their posters’ visual iconography is not exclusive to network films, the types of phrases and emphases used to advertise network films’ themes convey generic signifiers.
Promotional messages included on the seven films’ websites and posters also suggest generic likeness when they directly refer to other films. Altman notes that genre films’ advertising often draws on viewers’ familiarity with stars who are closely associated with particular genres (1999, 57). While network films represent an internationally varied selection of studios, some of their posters do emphasise likeness between films. One notable example belonging to a network film not included in the seven case studies is the poster for the Danish/Swedish/Norwegian coproduction *Hawaii, Oslo* (Poppe 2004; Figure 7.14). Above the central image quotes a review proclaiming its similarity to *Short Cuts* and *Magnolia*. This promotional message thus addresses audiences as already being familiar with network films.

![Figure 7.14](image-url)

Of the seven case studies, *Babel*’s poster (Figure 7.1) tells us it is from the same director as *Amores Perros* and *21 Grams*, which in this case also raises the viewer’s expectation that *Babel* will be another gritty drama told in a similar style. *Crash*’s poster (Figure 7.5) similarly notes that it is directed by the screenwriter and producer of the Oscar-winning (for Best Film) *Million Dollar Baby*, suggesting *Crash* will also be a hard-hitting, well crafted drama. Similar directorial glory is touted for Akin’s *Edge* (appearing in the wake of *Head-On*; Figure 7.3), while viewers familiar with the dramas and comedies of Ray Lawrence, Nia Di Nata and Nishikant Kamat may recognise their names on the posters; and on other posters the films’ festival acclaim is writ large (see
“US cover” 2010; “Spanish poster” 2007). These advertisements emphasise the films’ value as *auteur* films as well as acclaimed serious dramas. Further afield, posters for the popular network film *New Year’s Eve* make clear that it is “[f]rom the director of *Pretty Woman* & *Valentine’s Day*”, banking on the double association with romantic comedy and the similar narrative format of *Valentine’s Day*, thus working in the same way as *Babel’s* lauded heritage (“Us poster” 2011). Such close associations with similar modes of address (dramas, romantic comedies) as well as shared narrative formats (connoted in the tiling effects and association with some directors’ use of the network form in their other films) suggest that network films are being marketed both for their broad categories (dramas, thrillers, romantic comedies) as well as for their large star casts. The close stylistic likenesses of the posters for the seven films together with their taglines, promotional messages and associations with similar films from their directors suggest that the films are branded as a genre.

As well as textually, in their production and marketing it is clear that network films can be and are commonly treated as a genre. The fact that their marketing bears some similarity to that of other relevant genres maintains a slipperiness of classification (Altman 1999, 57). Nevertheless, as Chapter One discussed, as the textual analyses have shown, and as their production discourse and comparable marketing aesthetics display, network films are clearly being thought of as a generic group of films, despite their various origins.

**A Global Genre**

Both the textual analysis and investigation into the production and distribution of network films throughout this thesis has come to show that there is persuasive reason to describe network films as a global genre. As noted earlier the term “global genre” neutrally accommodates the differences and inequalities in the individual films’ geopolitical standings (see Chapter One 42). Although the seven case study films come from very different backgrounds and are financed in contrasting ways, the fact that narratively the texts show and their creators acknowledge generic likeness amongst them indicate that genre can exist as an international category. As indicated throughout the preceding chapters and as the next section and Chapter Eight explore in particular, the films’ national concerns and industry heritages are of course significant and individual. Nevertheless, the fact that this genre is prolific around the world adds
impetus to the argument that genre studies needs to extend past its Hollywood- and/or nation-centric trappings (see Chapter One 39-42). The concept of a global genre and its existence in the form of network films contributes to the important field of contemporary comparative film studies scholarship which seeks to move beyond the essentialising and limiting employment of categorical concepts including world cinema, art cinema, and national cinema (see Chapter One 39-42). Just how the seven case study network films, representative of a global genre, do reframe categorical concepts such as art cinema, mainstream cinema, national cinema, and world cinema is thereby the key subject of the following section and final chapter.

**Identification According to Distribution**

Having ascertained that textually and in terms of production these films conceivably constitute a genre, it is time now to broach the subject of how they fare as a genre that does not simply originate from one national industry. Before dealing with the theoretical implications of this question in Chapter Eight, this section compares how the films were produced and distributed around the world. It investigates the economic inequalities between the films’ production costs and their geographic ranges of distribution. These differences help to highlight and describe the perceived power relationships between film industries.

Since the seven network films are so different in origin, this section explores the extent to which their production and distribution relate to one another’s. The seven films listed represent a variety of industries: American independent films, multinational co-productions, European co-productions, Indonesian, Hindi, and Australian cinemas. The seven films entered the international stage through film festivals, but gained success to different extents. To use Bordwell’s phrase, these “films are jostling for international notice” (2008a, 245) but do not gain it to equal degrees. Although until now I have treated them as playing on a level field in regard to their narratives, when it comes to their economics, the film industries in which these films are situated are highly disproportionate.

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39 A tactic and in-depth study of this (following in both Halle [2010] and Dickey and Dudrah’s [2011] approaches to the topic) would be fascinating, but unfortunately the required time and space is not available to this thesis.
Industry Backgrounds, Budgets, and Film Festivals

At the outset of this thesis I noted that I chose the seven case studies in part because they come from very different geographies and directors. I also noted that I support Lúcia Nagib’s claim that the term “world cinema” should be taken to mean “simply the cinema of the world” (2006, 35). The various production and distribution relationships of the seven case study films indicate the complexity involved in such global processes and illustrate the murkiness of labelling these films according to their industry lineages. So far, I have been persuaded that textually and in terms of production, regardless of their different origins, these seven network films are representative of a global genre. Yet, as I observed in Chapter One, the seven case studies’ different geographical origins and film industries are often described both in academia and in popular discourse as significantly contrasting (35-6). Within this section I explain and discuss the films’ respective industry and distribution identities and how these factors become categorical schema for critics and reviewers. This highlights a topic that Chapter Eight further explores: the confusion that commonly exists between different film industries and categorical concepts such as world cinema, Hollywood and independent cinema, national cinemas, art cinema, and commercial practices.

During the remainder of this chapter I occasionally refer to the categorical terms national cinema, transnational cinema, independent or “indie” cinema, mainstream, Hollywood, art cinema and arthouse cinema. The prevalence of these terms to discussions surrounding network films was detailed in Chapter One (38-41). Chapter Eight provides further definition and explanation of these terms. For the purposes of this chapter I briefly touch on the nature and contradictions of these terms as they are employed in popular discourse regarding the seven case studies. In Chapter Eight I more closely explore the weaknesses and strengths of these definitions and their relationships to the seven films.

As noted in Chapter One (39), the term “world cinema” is often problematically used to denote a perceived binary opposition between Hollywood and “national cinemas”. However, I am of the persuasion that the term should be remobilised to signal not just the tensions but also the numerous complexities and interrelationships between film industries from all over the world (see Nagib 2006, 35). Films from individual non-American nations are often given the blanket description as “national” films. The term
“national cinema” thus signifies the collective (often labelled “art”) cinema of a particular nation. Within America a distinction is often made between films made by Hollywood studios, termed Hollywood or mainstream cinema, and films not financed by Hollywood companies, usually labelled independent or “indie” cinema. Regarding non-American nations, films are often described as either mainstream or “art” films, depending on a variety of factors, most significant of which is the perceived divide between popular, profitable entertainment and more “serious” films (Wong 2011, 6). I describe transnational cinema as that in which funding and input from more than one nation is present, although as William Brown (2010) superbly discusses and as Chapter Eight considers in greater detail, there are different degrees to which films are transnational (16). The terms national cinema, transnational cinema, and the perceived divides between mainstream and non-mainstream cinemas provoke much debate over whether they are mutually exclusive concepts. The extents to which films in these categories are appraised also draw contention. The following section addresses some of these debates in relation to the seven network films’ funding, distribution, and reception.

“Art cinema” is one of the most complex and problematic terms relevant to the seven case studies. The term is often closely associated with films that screen in film festivals (Wong 2011, 6), as did each of the seven films. As Chapter One discussed and as Chapter Eight details, the term “art cinema” is also popularly (although as Chapter Eight discusses, problematically) used to describe non-mainstream cinema. This means that the seven case studies are often described as “art films”. Frequently the term “art cinema” appears in conjunction with “national cinema”, as films from non-American countries are often perceived to contrast and/or compete with mainstream cinemas (Nichols 1994, 16-17; F. Chan 2011, 255-257; Wong 2011, 129). Occasionally I indicate this close association in shorthand with the label “national/art cinema”, although the two concepts are distinct. The term “arthouse cinema” is often used synonymously with “art cinema”, although a key distinction is that the term “arthouse” notionally refers to films that screen outside of mainstream venues, such as film festivals and single or few-screen cinemas – a distinction that Steve Neale’s work on the institutional aspects of art cinema clarifies (1981). As Chapter Eight indicates, Naficy (2010, 13-14) and Eleftheria Thanouli (2009) have rightly indicated that the rise of multiplexes and the popularity of film festivals confound such distinctions between notions of arthouse and mainstream cinema. Each of these concepts: national cinema; Hollywood; mainstream; art cinema; arthouse cinema; and independent cinema; arise
frequently in popular and academic discourse surrounding the production and distribution of network films. The argument that network films constitute a genre strongly challenges the integrity of each of these terms, a subject Chapter Eight concentrates upon. For the remainder of this chapter I outline the seven films’ production and distribution practices and some of the categories ascribed to them upon their reception. This is in order to consider how this perceived genre and the seven individual films relate to and reframe such terms, briefly in this chapter and more substantially in Chapter Eight.

The directors of the seven case studies come from very different cultural and geographical territories. The director and the writer of *Babel*, Inárritu and Arriaga come from backgrounds of making network films independently in Mexico and America, with their preceding films being *Amores Perros* and *21 Grams*. Haggis, the Canadian director of *Crash*, comes from a background in directing episodic television shows in Canada and America (Beiser 2012; see Bordwell 2008a, 195). Haneke is an Austrian director, but as Wheatley pertinently observes, “Haneke has long railed against his films being seen as treatments of specific national situations” (2009, 21). This is evident in the fact that many of Haneke’s co-funded films such as *Code Unknown* have been filmed in various European areas and critique the collective “European bourgeois” (21). *Edge* is described as a Turkish German film, reflecting Akin’s own cultural heritage. Mumbai’s director Kamat is Maharastrian (India’s Western region of which Mumbai is the capital), and has directed serious dramatic films in Marathi, Tamil and Hindi languages, all of which are significant film industries in India. Prior to directing *Love* Di Nata had made controversial and well known films in Indonesia. For example, *Cabaukan (The Courtesan)* (2002) is about a Chinese-Indonesian cross cultural relationship in colonial Indonesia, and *Arisan! (The Gathering)* (2003) is about homosexuality, feminism and friendships in contemporary Jakarta. Di Nata made these films after having returned to Indonesia in the mid 1990s from studying mass communications and filmmaking in America. *Lantana*’s director Lawrence, who moved to Australia from England in his youth, is regarded as an iconic Australian director even though he had only made one film fifteen years prior to *Lantana*, the surrealistic social satire *Bliss* (1985), adapted from Peter Carey’s novel of the same name. In addition to these various origins, the films’ production budgets and places of distribution are also varied. These

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40 Many of Akin’s films explore the topic of transnationalism (see Rings 2008; Mennel 2009; Petek 2007; and Fincham 2008).
directors’ and creators’ national identities also become part of the complex signifiers that emerge when commentators try to identify the films industrially and nationally.

These films are described in differing ways in connection with film industries. As well as their very different geographic and cultural backgrounds, the films have different production budgets, a fact which also tends to cloud descriptions of their categorical identities. According to IMDb’s “release dates” listings (2012; which in many cases unfortunately do not necessarily give a complete listing of films’ release conditions/locations but still provides the most comprehensive source of film release information accessible.) *Babel* was first released at film festivals: at Cannes, Toronto, Leids, Lyon, Rio de Janeiro, San Sebastian and Helsinki. It also gained general release in multiplexes around the world (Naficy 2010, 16). *Babel*’s estimated budget was US $25 million (“Box office/business for Babel” 2012), a relatively large amount for an independent film. Yet *Babel*’s financial budget and return (estimated worldwide at US $132.7 million [“Box office/business for Babel” 2012]) remain at the cheaper end of Hollywood. It was produced by Anonymous Content (a mid-sized studio which also funded *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *50 First Dates*), Inárritu’s company Zeta Films, the small French company Central Films, and the then fledgling Media Rights Capital, whose website claims it is a producer of “premium entertainment” (Media Rights Capital 2012). Paramount Vantage picked up the film’s distribution in the USA and Canada, marketing it as an independent film but providing it with strong economic support. These studios are independent sectors of major Hollywood studios (Kerr 2010, 44).

*Babel* and films with similar budgets such as *Traffic* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (see footnote 8) tread the line between being defined as Hollywood or independent films and are commonly associated with “indie” directors while featuring Hollywood stars and being financed by “studio-created subsidiaries” such as Paramount Vantage and Focus Features (formerly USA Films which produced *Traffic*) (King 2009,

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41 This is in comparison to mainstream Hollywood blockbusters from the same period such as *Superman Returns* (Singer 2006), *King Kong* (Jackson 2005) and *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest* (Verbinski 2006) whose budgets reach around and above the US $200 million mark. *Babel*’s budget is closer to films such as *The Constant Gardener* (Meirelles 2005) which had a budget of BP £15 million (“Box…The Constant Gardener” 2012) and is described as “a basically British production incorporated to Hollywood through distribution” (García-Mainar 2009, 3). *Babel*’s budget is also close to that of *Traffic* (Steven Soderbergh 2000, budget estimated at US $48 million [“Box…Traffic” 2012]) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, budget estimated at US $20 million (“Box…Eternal Sunshine” 2012).
At the levels of production *Babel* can be qualified as an independent film. Yet the influence of Hollywood companies upon *Babel’s* distribution suggests the label “independent” is not entirely accurate. Paul Kerr (2010) and Marina Hassapopoulou (2008) have convincingly written on this point, both coming to the conclusion that *Babel* is more an “internationally packaged art film” with the benefits of Hollywood financial backing and conservative narrative techniques, rather than an independent “arthouse” film according to the typical definition of independent arthouse films as low budget, non-Hollywood, and narratively innovative (Kerr 2010, 48-49; Hassapopoulou 2008). In his illuminating essay “*Babel’s* network narrative: packaging a globalized art cinema” Kerr (2010) suggests that *Babel’s* production and distribution processes indicate a strong degree of Hollywood imperialism. Kerr indicates that the input of the “American companies, mak[e] it, in financial terms at least, a predominantly American film” (45-6). *Babel’s* funding and distribution circuit illustrates a trend in which American films backed by companies closely related to Hollywood studios saturate international film festivals and go on to general releases internationally (Cooke 2007a, 3; Semati and Sotirin 1999). *Babel’s* nominations and wins at the Oscars and its cast of A list actors who are often simultaneously known as alternative and mainstream actors illustrate the cloudy nature of the divisions between mainstream and art cinema.

*Babel’s* initial festival distribution, nominations and awards mark it as an independent film, yet it went on to become a blockbuster in the arthouse domain and gained distribution in mainstream multiplexes. Understandably this has led to wide-ranging descriptions of *Babel’s* national identity. Some describe it as part of the “New Mexican Cinema” (Ebert 2007), and as a film made in opposition to Hollywood filmmaking (Barnard 2009, 208). Others discuss the ways in which Hollywood’s acclaim and funding for this “New Mexican Cinema” raises questions of cultural and economic imperialism as well as national and cultural negotiation (Waldron 2004, 5-6; Tierney 2009, 101-02). On the popular website IMDb user reviews describe *Babel* as anything from a Hollywood and/or mainstream film (yndprod-2 2006; phil-1119 2006; csarda1 2007; Beale 2007), to a pseudo art and/or pseudo-independent/indie film (bulk-

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42 Of note other specialty studio subsidiaries include Fox Searchlight and Warner Independent Pictures. 
43 For more on the relationship between Hollywood and independent studios see Scott (2002, 2004). For Iñárritu’s explanation of how *Babel* progressed from being a self-financed project to gaining distributors’ attention see “Capone” (2006).
44 For example Brad Pitt acted in the “indie” Coen brothers’ *Burn After Reading* (2008) as well as the Hollywood blockbuster *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (Liman 2005), means that *Babel* was able to gain mainstream recognition and reception.
to an “artfully made” film (mstomas; kenlee_kp 2009; Aberjhani 2008), to a film that is associated with festivals rather than the mainstream (cinna665 2006). The contradictions between these terms has led to popular and academic discourse on how to define Babel in relation to Mexican, independent, arthouse, mainstream and/or Hollywood cinema (see Hassapopoulou 2008; Kerr 2010). Numerous questions about Babel’s national and industry identity have been directed to the ether of blogs on the internet, and have sparked discussions in reports and academic articles (shadowcat [c.2006]; Yahoo! Answers; CNN 2007; Tierney 2009; Kerr 2010; Hassapopoulou 2008). Evidently because of the ways in which Babel is identified with Mexican creators, multinational locations, and multilingual actors, art cinema thematics and aesthetics (discussed in Chapter Eight), festival distribution and Hollywood funding, there is little common consensus about Babel’s national or industry identity.

Similar confusion to that surrounding Babel’s national and industrial identity occurs in relation to Crash. Crash’s budget was estimated at US $6.5 million, a significantly smaller amount than Babel’s budget (“Box office/business for Crash” 2012). It played at the 2004 Toronto film festival and at smaller festivals during its release period, for example Newport Beach in the USA, then at Espoo in Finland, Deauville in France and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. In the middle of 2005 it went into general release in the USA where by early September of 2005 it had earned around US $55 million (“Box office/business for Crash” 2012). It was placed in limited released in Australia, Turkey, Iceland, Belgium, and Singapore and continued to have a staggered release up until early 2006 in other countries. In early 2006 it was tipped for Oscar nominations and was re-released in the USA, Turkey, Mexico, Germany and Argentina, eventually earning almost US $98.5 million worldwide (“Crash” 2010). Crash was funded principally by the studios Bull’s Eye Entertainment and Bob Yari Productions, which went on to produce other independent films including Thumbsucker, The Illusionist, The Painted Veil, and Dave Chapelle’s Block Party.45 These funding and distribution conditions mark Crash as a mid-budget independent film, a “sleeper” success which gradually gained popularity through its staggered distribution, leading to its recognition in the mainstream signified by the Academy Awards.

45 Incidentally in 2011 Haggis won a lawsuit against Bob Yari who had failed to pay Haggis the contractual percentage of Crash’s profits (Gardner 2011; Waxman 2006).
Despite these conditions marking *Crash* as an independent film, on the popular website IMDb, which encourages user reviews and forums, many claim it is a Hollywood film (Richards 2005; awalter1 2006; fedor8 2007; jeffrplant 2006; cmcmong 2005) and a Hollywood-made pseudo-art or pseudo-independent/indie film (Richards 2005; Elise S.; GundamJack 2006). Only some describe it as an indie or independent film, yet even then accuse it of having Hollywood narrative elements (danielhsf 2005). Similarly, scholarly articles and reviews range from describing it as a Hollywood film (Taylor 2005 cited in Giroux and Giroux 2007, 745; Hsu 2006, 132), to a film which sits in between Hollywood and independent cinema camps (Carlsten 2007, 5). Carlsten describes *Crash* as an example of “Liberal” cinema which consists of a “hybridised Hollywood-indie-international milieu” (2007, 5; see also King 2009; Tzioumakis 2008, 10; Semati and Sotirin 1999). *Crash*, much like *Babel*, is a film which in common view lies somewhere in between an “indie” and a “mainstream” production. Commentators are evidently unclear about what types of categories these films fit within in regard to national cinema, art cinema, and the industries of Hollywood and independent filmmaking. This lack of consensus surrounding *Crash* indicates that the popular understandings of independent vs. Hollywood filmmaking are considerably varied and unclearly defined. Such inconsistencies foreground permeability in these types of definitions and labels.

Whereas *Babel* and *Crash* engender disagreement about their national identities and industrial labels, Austrian director Haneke’s Paris-located, French-language film *Code Unknown* is more consistently labelled an “art film” which stands in strong contrast to mainstream cinemas (singlesimon03 2005; zetes 2003; Rogue-32 2007; Fickling 2001). *Code Unknown* was shown in film festivals in Cannes, Toronto, Karlovy Vary, Thessaloniki, Hong Kong and Hungary, with general releases in France, Turkey, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Greece, Italy, Spain, the UK, Poland, Norway, New York, Switzerland and Denmark (“Release dates for Code Unknown” 2012). It was awarded the prize of the Ecumenical Jury in Cannes as well as being nominated for the Palme d’Or, and it also won the Silver Frog prize at the Camerimage festival in Poland (“Awards for Code Unknown” 2012). *Code Unknown* is thereby strongly associated with film festivals and art cinema. Yet, while viewers unanimously agree that *Code Unknown* is an art film (see Galt 2010, 221), they are less sure of its national identity. On IMDb’s user reviews some label it a French film (Gokbudak 2005; Brunton 2005; planktonrules 2007; enddust 2002), some identify it as Austrian or
simply state it is from an Austrian director (tedg 2009; singlesimon03 2005; dbdumonteil 2005), and some say it is a film about Europe and/or Europeans in general (Rivera 2001). None of these viewers note that it is a coproduction or had funding from various countries. Despite its budget not being listed on online film sites such as IMDb or Rotten Tomatoes,46 we do know that Code Unknown was primarily produced by well-established and wealthy French studios: Canal+, France 2 Cinema and MK2 Productions (MK2 also distributed it in France and have coproduced other films which cross European and non-European borders such as A Time for Drunken Horses [Ghobadi 2000]). Code Unknown also had financial input from Bavaria Film, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, and the Romanian Culture Ministry, rendering it a European coproduction and part of the European Union’s strong push for coproductions (see Elsaesser 2005, 491). Code Unknown’s international input thereby complicates the notion that it belongs to a particular “national” cinema.

At the same time as coproductions confuse the term “national cinema”, they are not affairs of equality. France plays a prominent part amongst coproductions in Europe, and in coproductions with countries beyond European borders such as Iran (Brown 2010, 21; Elsaesser 2005, 499). This is evident throughout Haneke’s filmmaking, as many of his films are either made in France and/or the French language, star French actors, and concern French history (see Silvey 2011, 3-4). But Haneke’s career has also stretched beyond these Austrian/French/European boundaries to include the English language remake of his own Austrian Funny Games, for which he employed well known Anglo stars Naomi Watts and Tim Roth. Therefore, on the one hand, any singular identification of Code Unknown as a particular national film is complicated, due to its multinational funding and its director’s self-confessed national flexibility. On the other hand, a broader identification as a border-crossing European film leads to an even further complication of the idea of national cinemas, as Tim Bergfelder discusses in his 2005 article “National, Transnational or Supranational Cinema? Rethinking European film studies”. Bergfelder comes to the conclusion that as an entity unto itself European cinema is to be thought of as a perpetually re- and de-territorialising enigma. He writes:

46 Furthermore, its gross earnings are incompletely reported on IMDb since the site does not list its earnings in all countries where it screened, including Australia. Heath (2006) does state, however, that Code Unknown had a larger budget than Haneke’s earlier 71 Fragments.
Like the European idea on a larger scale, European cinema as a concept is defined by the simultaneous agencies of dispersal and recentring, which perpetually challenge easy solutions to the questions of identity and ‘home’. (329)

Although many think of *Code Unknown* as a relatively typical example of national “art cinema”, it is evidently another film which complicates the idea that national cinemas are distinctly defined and individual. The idea of European cinema particularly confounds this notion, reflecting Europe itself as a collection of perpetually changing borders and qualities.

As a coproduction between Turkey and Germany *Edge* is another case study which underscores indeterminacy in relation to definitions of national cinemas. *Edge* was shown in many more countries than *Code Unknown*. It screened at festivals in Cannes, Finland, France, Thailand, Poland, the Philippines, Toronto, Iceland, Edmonton, the Czech Republic (in the German language film festival), São Paulo, Seville, Thessaloniki, Oslo, Dubai, Portland (Oregon), Berlin, Australia, in some states of America (Newport, Wisconsin, RiverRun, Frameline, Tallgrass), Argentina, Mexico and Indonesia. Outside of these festivals *Edge* went to general or limited release in Germany, Sweden, Turkey, Italy, Belgium, France, Denmark, Norway, Greece, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Taiwan, Spain, Finland, Israel, Hungary, Estonia, Brazil, Lebanon, the United States of America, Romania, Estonia, Russia, Greece, Portugal, Poland, Japan, Mexico, Argentina, Australia and Chile. *Edge* was evidently a successful film, screening in festivals as well as in arthouse cinemas. In reviews and articles, Akin’s film is almost always described as a transnational Turkish German film, occasionally in non-academic discourse just as a German film (Superunknovvn 2008), sometimes a European film (Kaspersen 2012; Superunknovvn 2008; madcardinal 2010; jm10701 2009), and sometimes in contrast to Hollywood films (Yung 2008). Interestingly none of the reviewers on IMDb describe it as an “art” film, simply letting the terms associated with Europe stand in for an identifier of non-commercial festival fare. *Edge*’s success and status as an art film thus signals the perceived interchangeable nature of the labels “national” and “art” cinema.

*Edge* is a coproduction, with uneven financial territory located between its German, Italian and Turkish financial contributions. As with *Code Unknown*, it is
unclear what its budget was.\textsuperscript{47} The film’s funding came primarily from German studios, as well as the Italian studio Dorje Film. Despite having a cast ranging widely between Turks, Germans and Turkish Germans, this German-heavy budget signals that transnational cinema is not an economically equalising force between the involved countries (see Higbee and Lim 2010; Sarkar 2010; Ezra and Rowden 2006; Brown 2010). Evidently this film’s funding raises questions about both the identification of and distinctions between national cinema and transnational cinema. Drawing attention to complications in ideas of both national and transnational cinema, Gerd Gemünden talks of Akin firmly identifying his earlier film \textit{In July} as a German film in order to avoid typecasting himself as a director of minority cinema (180). This offers a flexibility of the term “transnational” in relation to Akin’s situation between Germany’s margins and mainstream (Gemünden 188-89). The descriptive term “transnational” evidently holds broad and complex ideational capacities, rather than signalling, for example, a simple collaboration or equal relationship between multiple countries and people who live between multiple countries.

\textit{Lantana} is one of the case studies that is more consistently identified in terms of national cinema in contrast to those discussed above. Academic articles and user reviews on IMDb indicate that viewers perceive it as an independent or arthouse film (MacFarlane 2002, 160; Collins and Davis 2004, 34; michael94523 2002; fernandolvenegas 2002; paul_supercala 2002; oandafan 2002), and a definitive Australian film (a type of “Short Cuts Down Under” [pf9 2002]). However, such labels are problematic in \textit{Lantana}’s case. \textit{Lantana} is another coproduction, unfortunately whose budget is not clearly listed. As well as Australian funding from Jan Chapman production studios and the Australian Film Finance Corporation, \textit{Lantana} was in part produced by a German company MBP. MBP is based in Munich (MBP 2012a). It has co-funded the Australian television productions \textit{Stingers} (1998-2004) and \textit{Something in the Air} (2000-2002). As well as co-funding Australian films, the company has funded other international films. MBP’s coproduced films include Fred Schepisi’s England based film \textit{Last Orders} (2001), the American German coproduction \textit{Taking Sides} (2001), and the Irish film \textit{Wild About Harry} (2000) (MBP 2012b). Despite this German input, \textit{Lantana}’s narrative, director and setting (and lack of German influence upon the

\textsuperscript{47} The budget for Akin’s film is not listed on its official site or press release kit, nor on IMDb, and its stated gross earnings on IMDb are inaccurate, as they list only the USA’s takings (“Box ... The Edge of Heaven” 2012).
narrative) mark it as an Australian film in viewers’ eyes. Yet it is evident that such a label is not entirely accurate.

In terms of distribution, *Lantana* was received well at international festivals such as Toronto, Athens and Telluride in the US, and in Australia it gained widespread recognition and ran for extended seasons at arthouse cinemas (Collins and Davis 2004, 34). Brian MacFarlane (2002) argues that it occupies a niche market which embodies Australian cinema’s only hope of countering Hollywood’s dominating presence (160). Kirsty Duncanson (2009) describes its passage, writing:

In 2001 it was initially released as a niche market, arthouse movie with limited distribution. However, its season was extended and it opened to more theatres, including a number of mainstream multiplexes where it out-grossed other, more commercial films. (30)

This fact raises doubt about the ways in which independent and commercial cinemas are defined, since *Lantana* was distributed in mainstream cinemas and financially trumped commercial mainstream films within Australia. Initially *Lantana*’s production and distribution strongly identified it as an arthouse Australian film, but its popularity within Australia points to the problem of the unstable and blurry definition between the two categories arthouse and commercial cinema, particularly in the interstices between local and international distribution.

Similar to *Crash*, *Love* and *Mumbai* are clear examples of singularly nationally produced films. They were funded solely by Indonesian and Indian companies respectively, the countries in which they were made and which they concern. However, as with the five case studies discussed above, the labels attributed to them are problematic and the distribution of these two network films illustrate some of the ways in which globalisation works unevenly. *Love* is commonly regarded as a low-budget Indonesian art film since it tackles controversial social issues and takes a feminist approach (Schmidt 2012, 31). However, as I further discuss in Chapter Eight, some viewers see its use of comedy as a deflection of its “art cinema” seriousness, thereby apparently placing it more in line with mainstream cinema (V. Chan 2007). *Love* was shown in festivals in the USA, Canada, France, the Philippines and the UK but only had general releases in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (“Release dates for Love for Share” 2012). At festivals in Hawaii it won a best picture award, and in Brussels won
best director (“Awards for Berbagi” 2012). Although Love was controversial yet indicated to be somewhat popular in Indonesia (Kurnia 2009, par.51) and at international festivals, it nevertheless remains relatively unknown outside of these channels. In being distributed at international festivals in the contexts of Islamic film, Gay and Lesbian film, Southeast Asian cinema, or even the unsatisfactorily broad “Asian cinema” (Ciecko 2006 4-7), Love becomes associated with multiple vectors and identities rather than only that of Indonesian cinema (see “Release dates for Love for Share” 2012). Love’s distribution and identifications further illustrate the narrowness of the category of national cinema.

Mumbai’s production and distribution highlight some of the key contradictions and problems surrounding the Western perception of Indian cinemas. Similar to examples of “national” cinemas as discussed above, the concept of a singular national “Indian cinema” is rife with inaccuracies and inadequacies. Indian cinema, often misguidedly described as “Bollywood” in the West, is the most prolific film industry in the world and surpasses Hollywood in the number of films produced yearly (Thoraval 2000, 451). Indian cinema’s diverse output consists of productions in several different languages. As Ranjani Mazumdar (2007) explains:

India has four powerful film industries located in different parts of the country, each addressing cultural specificities and contexts. While there are many similarities and overlaps in the narratives, the differences are equally striking in both content and form. Any attempt to locate or club all these industries within the category of a ‘national cinema’ would only suppress the textures that go into the making of these diverse films. Therefore, assumptions about ‘the national’ speaking through ‘the cinema’ need to be attentive to this diverse reality. (xxxiii-xxxiv)

Although Hindi is the official national language and the majority of films use it (Virdi 2003, 30-31), films are frequently entirely remade into different languages (often using different actors and locations) in order to reach regionally diverse audiences. The industry also makes English language films for some estimated 30 million viewers (Thoraval 2000, 197; Virdi 2003, 3) (recalling the fact that English language films are also made in Europe for European distribution). Thoraval (2000) relevantly argues that the nation is not a homogeneous or self contained, insular notion in India, despite the popularity of Hindi blockbusters and the typical Western subsumption of these cinemas under the label Bollywood (212). Inconsistencies are also evident in the production and
distribution of Mumbai. Mumbai is a relatively small film, with its estimated budget around $1.4 million US (“Box office/business for Mumbai” 2012) in comparison to the top grossing Hindi film of that year Ghajini (Murugadoss 2008), which happens to be a remake of Memento and had a budget over $11 million US (“Box office/business for Ghajini” 2012). Mumbai was distributed by UTV Motion Pictures, a production and distribution studio which describes itself as occupying a strong position in between mainstream and art cinema distribution channels (UTV 2012). As well as its relatively low budget placing it in the “art cinema” category, Mumbai received mixed reviews in India and is relatively unknown outside of India. It contains none of the extravagant song and dance routines Western viewers associate with Bollywood films. Mumbai was only released in India, Kuwait and France at the Lyon Asiexpo film festival (“Release dates for Mumbai” 2012). On IMDb Mumbai is thirteenth on a list of the films with the most viewer ratings of 7.6 (a high admiration rating for the film) yet lowest financial success (“Worst” 2012). Thus, for Western conceptions Mumbai does not appear to fit the stereotype of a high-budget Bollywood entertainment film. Furthermore, it is reviewed on one website titled “Planet Bollywood”, inferring it is a Bollywood film, although the review describes it as an “art movie” or a “serious film” (Gandhi 2012). Other reviews describe it as unlike other films from Bollywood (Chatterjee 2008; Jasani 2008; Mehrotra 2008; vausham 2008; pilkhane 2008; Sabat 2008; sandeepspatil 2008).

There is evidently much contention over categorical terms such as Indian cinema/Indian cinemas, “mainstream”/“Bollywood” and “non-mainstream” or “art cinema” in relation to Mumbai’s production and distribution.

Such various descriptive labels, channels of distribution, and different financial backgrounds underscore the inconsistencies of how these films are defined as “art films” according to their festival distribution and serious subjects. These inconsistencies highlight the term “art cinema”’s close but problematic association with that of “national cinema”. Given network films’ predilection for ensemble casts, multicultural, global and transnational themes, it seems so far that in these particular cases their production backgrounds reflect a similar slipperiness of geopolitical categories. In part because of the quality of the films and in part because of their star appeal, creative appeal and financial support from their production studios and distributors, the films naturally differ in popularity. Whereas Babel, Crash and Edge became extremely popular, Lantana and Code Unknown became locally popular with moderate international success. Love’s controversial topics made it infamous locally although it
did not travel widely, and *Mumbai* did moderately well at home but not so well abroad. The degrees to which these films were screened around the world in festivals and general releases illustrate the different conditions of their identification as “art films” according to the definition of art cinema as that which is screened at film festivals (Wong 2011, 6). Thus, it is evident that the labels assigned to these seven network films convey a complex and often contradictory mix of associations. It appears that such labels and their attending textual connotations deserve further investigation in order to answer the question of how the seven network films and the global genre of network films relate to notions of “world cinema”, a topic which the following chapter explores.

**Chapter Conclusion: a Global Genre and the Problems of Categories**

This chapter has shown that network films are indeed a global genre. In their creation, production, and marketing, as well as textual similarities, the films are clearly considered and presented as belonging to a distinctive group. I therefore argue that network films are a global genre. The idea of a global genre raises complex issues of how the films are globally related, perceived, distributed, and categorised, both in popular and academic discourse. Of particular note is how this global genre reframes questions surrounding the categories and notions of world cinema, as this chapter illustrated. This chapter has shown how network films blur, consolidate and problematise the types of production and distribution categories into which they fall and against which they push. The comparisons drawn have signalled the complexity of the flows and labels of world cinema. The notion that network films form a global genre does not mean that all these films are produced, distributed, viewed or profit equally. Having investigated how the seven network films have been produced, distributed, and received, it is evident that this global genre helps redefine notions of world cinema. This global genre demands that we examine the exchanges and relationships between different industries rather than simply regard them as self-contained. As well as these factors, the seven films’ narrative qualities also theoretically define them. In the next chapter I investigate how the films articulate differences which arise from their different cultural standings and backgrounds, paying particular attention to how they correspond to notions of art cinema, national cinema, and world cinema.
Chapter Eight: Network Films and World Cinema

In this chapter I discuss the concept of world cinema in relation to the seven case studies’ narrative themes, textual elements, styles and modes of address. As explained in Chapter One, two of the reasons I chose these seven films to analyse are because they have all commonly been labelled “art” films and because they represent cinemas usually regarded in the rubric of “national” and “world cinema”. In Chapter Seven we saw how such labels are variously and often conflictingly applied to the seven films in the process of their distribution and reception. However, reviewers’ categorical labelling of the seven case studies also depends on narrative qualities as well as industry backgrounds. Drawing on the previous chapters’ analyses, this chapter focuses on how and whether the terms “national”, “world”, and “art” cinema correlate with the films’ narrative qualities.

This chapter’s first section outlines general characteristics attributed to different types of cinemas. It discusses how these characteristics are changing in view of globalisation and in regard to debates around what comprises world cinema, national cinemas and the power relationships between such cinemas. The effects of globalisation have long been destabilising the concepts of distinct national cinemas and the relationships between them and Hollywood cinema (see Stone 2007; Cooke 2007b; Langford 2005). In the second section I analyse network films in relation to how as individual films and as a global genre they affect interpretations of national and world cinema. I ask whether or not their narrative qualities are typical of the industries and traditions from which the particular films come, and how the answers to this question may reframe notions of industrially and nationally differentiated cinemas. While it is generally surmised that the borders between national, art, mainstream, and Hollywood cinema are contestable and unclear, each case study illustrates this argument in different ways. The particular differences in the way these concepts are contested and blurred indicate the irreducible complexity of world cinema, when it is seen as “simply the cinema of the world” (Nagib 2006, 35)

Summary of “Art Films”’ Narrative Qualities

As noted, in order to provide a manageable topic, I chose the seven films as examples of “art cinema” according to the general condition that they were screened at
film festivals. This common association is noted by Rick Altman (1999, 91), citing Peter Wollen’s interview of the Brazilian artist Artur Omar who “postulates the existence of ‘a new genre of films: the Film Festival genre’” (see also Wong 2011, 6, 66). Altman paraphrases Wollen’s theory, explaining that, “‘festival’ films are defined by their exhibition venue rather than by their textual characteristics” (91). Wollen takes the idea from Brazilian artist and videomaker Artur Omar … [who noted that] [f]ilms in this genre were specially made according to their own rules and traditions in order to win prizes at Festivals. They were immediately recognizable as Festival Films by juries, critics and audiences alike. (Wollen 2001, 123)

Accordingly, one might argue that it is not surprising that network films, a group of films frequently (although by no means exclusively) associated with film festivals and national cinemas, form a genre. Wollen’s idea is problematic, as discussed below, yet the matter of how films are branded according to their distribution is of pertinence to the seven films. Steve Neale’s influential article “Art Cinema as Institution” (1981) drew attention to the fact that the narrative content and circulation of European art cinema is highly influenced by institutional structures such as state funding, censorship, film import legislation, and festival distribution (29-33). Neale writes that “Art films are produced for international distribution and exhibition as well as for local consumption” (35), typically via film festivals. Similarly, Dudley Andrew notes that the concept “global art cinema” (discussed in Galt and Schoonover’s 2010 book of the same name) refers to art films which address international rather than specifically local audiences, and usually travel in international film festivals (Andrew 2010a, viii).

The claims that the conditions of distribution venues and the confluence of narrative qualities mark festival films as a genre are contentious. One crucial reason for contention to this claim is that in recent years Hollywood blockbusters and cross-over Hollywood/independent films such as The Tourist (Donnersmarck 2010), Intolerable Cruelty (Coen and Coen 2003), The Matrix Reloaded (Wachowski and Wachowski 2003) and W (Stone 2008) are being shown at film festivals such as Cannes, taking advantage of media exposure at festivals and gaining “cross-over appeal” (de Valck 104, 123-4; Wong 2011, 6; see Zoysa 2002). Conversely, films which have been blockbusters in their countries of production have also been interpreted as “serious”
films in international festivals (Wong 2011, 6). It is thereby arguable that a film’s distribution process does not necessarily depend on its narrative qualities.

Furthermore, the notion that art films are distinct from popular genre films is problematic, particularly when observing their textual components (Wong 2011, 87; Bordwell 2012). Marijke de Valck argues that during the 1990s

genre films and ‘art cinema’ began to merge, as they freely appropriated each other’s narrative conventions and formal styles in the new brand of world cinema. As a result, it became easier for directors and (star) actors to move between Hollywood studio productions, independent projects, and international co-productions. (124)

Regarding textual elements, these arguments see different types of cinema in close relationship and exchange with one another. More cynical responses to this cross-over trend are common. David Bordwell (2008a, 191) and Hamid Naficy (2010, 18) both make similar claims about network films such as Babel, suggesting that Hollywood and popular industries have appropriated a type of narrative which originated in art cinema to profitable and populist rather than artistic ends. These points show that defining art films as those which were screened at festivals is problematic if one also defines art cinema as different to Hollywood and popular genre cinema.

Another crucial reason for the argument that “art cinema” is not a genre is that there are many different types of “art cinema”. Eleftheria Thanouli’s (non-paginated) 2009 article “‘Art Cinema’ Narration: Breaking Down a Wayward Paradigm” strongly and succinctly critiques the use of the term “art cinema”, describing the term as “one of the fuzziest…concepts in film studies”. She derides the fact that the definitions of art cinema have not substantially been refined since their appearance roughly three decades ago in Bordwell’s ([1979] 2002) and Neale’s (1981) articles about the narrative and institutional qualities of “art cinema”. Thanouli notes

[t]o assume that every film that circulates in film festivals or is produced by non-profit organizations features by definition an art cinema narration is severely misleading.

Thanouli’s statement further supports the argument that the claim that the conditions of distribution venues mark films as a genre is weak and problematic.
Moreover, Thanouli’s 2009 article concentrates on Bordwell’s seminal accounts of the narrative qualities of “art cinema” put forward in his 1979 article “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice” and his chapter “Art-Cinema Narration” in his 1985 book *Narration in the Fiction Film*. In these works Bordwell describes a range of narrative techniques and motifs which he sees as definitive of European art cinema from the 1960s and 1970s. As noted in Chapter One (34-5), these qualities include realism, open-endings, ambiguity, intellectual rigour, and a focus on controversial topics (Bordwell [1979] 2002, 95-9; 1985, 206-213). These qualities have been subsequently and often indiscriminately used to identify “art cinema”, despite the fact that Bordwell’s chapter “Art-Cinema Narration” specifies their particular application to European films of the 1960s and 1970s (1985, 232). Thanouli draws attention to the emergence of several distinct film movements subsequent to Bordwell’s publications, including Dogme 95, Jeffrey Sconce’s idea of “the new American ‘smart’ film” (a category to which Sconce [2002, 350] argues the network film *Magnolia* belongs), and New Iranian Cinema. Each of these movements has distinct qualities which descriptions such as realism, open-endings, ambiguity and intellectual rigour fail to specify. Thanouli therefore comes to the conclusion that “Given the enormous changes in the institutional setting of global cinema, the need to update our paradigms is more critical than ever”. Seeing as each of the case studies relates to different cinema movements and cultures, I follow Thanouli’s lead in attending to the ways in which they complicate and challenge definitions of “art cinema”.

Despite these strong arguments warning against the inaccuracy and unclear nature of the term “art cinema”, Chapter Seven showed that the term is nevertheless commonly used, especially in relation to the seven case studies. Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong points out that the term remains useful to some degrees (2011, 99), a point with which I agree, since the narratives, politics, and styles of “art films”, including the case studies, often contrast with those of mainstream cinemas. However, in agreement with Thanouli’s argument (2009) I contend that the overly broad application of the term “art

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48 Noting the same article by Wollen as Altman does, Wong (2011) provides an interesting investigation into the question of whether there is “a ‘genre’ of major festival films” (66, 7). She comes to the conclusion that “festival films do not constitute a genre per se but do constitute a process of genrification” in that they are broadly similar and are discursively considered as a particular group of films (99). “Genrification” is the discursive process whereby “adjectives become nouns” to describe types of films (Altman 1999, 54; see Chapter One 20-1).
cinema” is unsatisfactory. The term deserves close scrutiny in order to challenge the assumption that it denotes a distinct product. As the preceding chapters have shown, network films’ generic properties mean that they need not be solely “defined by their exhibition venue rather than by their textual characteristics” (Altman 1999, 91). My study has shown that these films might indeed constitute a genre based on their textual characteristics despite their different processes of production and distribution. But to what extent do the seven films exhibit the narrative tropes of “art cinema”? Could “art cinema” examples of network films form another subcategory of “art cinema” similar to those of Dogme 95 and New Iranian Cinema as Thanouli (2009) describes? And does the fact that there are numerous overlaps between “art cinema” and “mainstream” examples of network films further challenge the integrity of the label “art cinema”? These questions are asked partly in view to tease out the implications of de Valck’s assertion that genre films and art cinema have merged (124). Beyond addressing de Valck’s proposition, I investigate the extents to which the seven case studies do or do not reflect the attributes commonly associated with definitions of art films and national cinemas. Attempts to definitively divide art cinema from mainstream cinema and to define national cinemas as distinctive have been subject to much criticism (See Wong 2011; Thanouli 2009; Dennison and Lim 2006; Ďurovičová and Newman 2010). My investigation probes the problems and usefulness of these broad terms. It highlights multiple ways in which world cinemas when world cinemas have increasingly blurred borders.

In order to investigate how the seven case studies reframe terms such as art, at, mainstream, and world cinema, we need to specify the narrative qualities that are commonly associated with art cinema and the films’ respective national cinemas. In Chapter One (33) I provided a brief summary of the narrative qualities commonly attributed to art cinema. To reiterate here, art cinema’s textual attributes are said to include realism, open-endings, ambiguity, intellectual rigour, and a focus on characters who are culturally marginalised (Bordwell [1979] 2002, 95-9; Neale 1981, 13-14). Mainstream and art cinemas are often distinguished by the degree of narrative closure and thematic messages they give (Everett 2005, 164; Bordwell [1979] 2002, 96-7). Traditionally Hollywood films project conclusive dénouements with conservative messages of restored social and familial harmony. Art films typically choose more ambiguous and unresolved endings (Everett 2005, 163-4). Wong also describes the key attribute of festival films as their “serious” thematic nature (2011, 99), and notes the
prevalence of a number of qualities amongst many successful festival films. These qualities consist of: small budgets (75); everyday locations (75); demanding a “concerted effort from the audience to actively seek the meaning that texts imply” (75); providing “[a]lternatives to established Hollywood aesthetics” (79); avoiding “direct causality” and instead using narrative “ellipses” which suggests that “time is there to be experienced” rather than merely serving the plot (80-81). Wong also notes that “the films in competitions do not always have stars or even professional actors”, a fact which “imbues the films with authenticity” (2011, 82-3; a situation seen in Babel). Conversely, considering the use of famous actors, Wong writes “[f]estival films also transform actors, deconstructing stardom and yet incorporating its allures” (83). Wong notes that in terms of narrative conventions “Genre crossing and hybridization can also make a film more novel, difficult and acceptable” (86). And while “Mainstream cinema tends to stay away from controversy…festivals invite and savor films that tackle controversial subject matters” (87). This is an aspect which “follows a long tradition of seeing art as free and touting festivals as zones that champion that freedom” (90). These qualities supposedly distinguish different film industries, mainstream and art cinemas. They are ones which, where applicable, I consider in relation to the question of whether and how the seven case studies qualify as or reframe the notion of “art cinema” vis-à-vis the notion of a global genre.

**National Cinemas’ Attributed Qualities**

In addition to the narrative qualities of art cinema described above, individual national cinemas are often described as having distinct aesthetics and narrative techniques. Here I outline key narrative qualities attributed each of the national cinemas with which the seven case studies are associated. Generally, national cinemas, often closely associated with festivals, are also seen as alternatives to Hollywood films. Stephen Crofts, for instance, describes “seven varieties of ‘national cinema’” according to the ways in which they relate to Hollywood (1993, 27). In this long quote he lists

1. cinemas that differ from Hollywood, but do not compete directly, by targeting a distinct, specialist market sector [e.g. French, Australian, Indian];
2. those that differ, do not compete directly but do directly critique Hollywood [occasionally French, Australian, Indian];
3. European and Third World entertainment cinemas that struggle against Hollywood with limited or no success [e.g. French];
(4) cinemas that ignore Hollywood, an accomplishment managed by few [e.g. Indian];
(5) anglophone [sic] cinemas that try to beat Hollywood at its own game; [e.g. Australian]
(6) cinemas that work within a wholly state-controlled and often substantially state-subsidized industry; and
(7) regional or national cinemas whose culture and/or language take their distance from the nation-states which enclose them. (27)

Crofts’ breakdown of which and how national cinemas relate to Hollywood shows a common way in which national cinemas are likened to one another in contrast to Hollywood. Simultaneously these cinemas are individually differentiated. Crofts’ summary suggests that all national cinemas are often intrinsically affected by Hollywood and the need to contend with it in the way they create and film narratives. Andrew Higson (2002) iterates this idea when he remarks

Part of the problem, of course, is the paradox that for a cinema to be nationally popular it must also be international in scope. That is to say, it must achieve the international (Hollywood) standard. (58; see also O'Regan 1996, 1)

Conversely, national cinemas have greatly influenced Hollywood conventions. Crofts (1993) argues that

The generic mixing of Hollywood from, say, the early 1960s has been complicated by its interchange with European art cinema developments. Hollywood has developed its own art cinema after and alongside the spaghetti Western, Nouvelle Vague… (29)

To view the adoption of Hollywood narrative techniques as a wholly negative factor and culturally imperialistic arguably implies a patronising attitude towards other cinemas’ cultural integrity. It does not account for the possibility that such adoption of Hollywood conventions may be intended and autonomous. In this regard the question of whether national cinemas can be defined as having essential and individual qualities reveals multiple and complex chains of influence and the issue of intentional fallacy. The question of whether any national cinema is entirely “uncontaminated” by any outside influence, including Hollywood’s, is thus problematic.

In Chapter One (35) I observed that there is much discussion about how the narrative qualities of network films relate to different film industries from around the
world, but there has not been a strong comparison between network films from different countries. I explained that Bordwell’s (2008a) claims that network films reflect attributes typically associated with their respective national cinemas hold weight for the films he discusses, but that he does not fully take into account the amounts of cross-pollination and blurred borders between films from different industries. I am analysing a different selection of films. This second section accordingly takes the time to provide close analysis and explore the problematics of categorical terms. I outline key narrative qualities typically associated with the films’ relevant national cinemas and examine the extents to which the films reflect such qualities. This exploration examines whether understandings of world cinema, national cinemas, and art cinema need to be reconsidered in light of the global genre of network films.

**Indian Cinema/s: Mumbai My Life and the Troubles with Bollywood**

*Mumbai* is often described as a Bollywood film (Chapter Seven 238). In its broadest sense the term “Bollywood” denotes mainstream Hindi cinema produced in Mumbai. However, it also unfairly suggests that the industry is a mirror of Hollywood, which it is not (Virdi 2003, 21). Popular Hindi cinema has come to be known as India’s “national” cinema in counter to India’s numerous “regional” non-Hindi language film industries (Virdi 2003, 9, 21). This is because of the Hindi language’s widespread recognition and Hindi cinema’s nation-wide popularity, which, as Jyotika Virdi argues, prompts a view of Hindi cinema as an instrument of “internal colonization” (2003, 33). The multiplicity of intranational film industries further suggests that the term “national cinema” is broad and problematic in the contexts of Indian cinema (Chakravarty 2000, 223-24). As a Hindi film, *Mumbai* points to the complicated position the term “national cinema” holds for Indian cinemas.

Although *Mumbai* is often labelled a “Bollywood” film, this label does not adequately describe its identity as a film which uses a mixture of mainstream and art cinema narrative techniques. As noted earlier, *Mumbai* is produced by UTV Motion Pictures, a studio whose website describes it as occupying a middle ground between popular and art cinema (UTV 2012; see Chapter Seven 240). This underscores the cloudiness of the division between contemporary art and popular Hindi cinema. Yves Thoraval describes the art cinema industry of the mid to late 1990s as “floundering”
(2000, 147). He explains that contemporary art films are a hybrid between art cinema and commercial cinema, stating

Financial constraints spelt doom for...auteur films and led some of the directors to adopt a more middle path – a mixture of ingredients from ‘art’ and ‘commercial’ cinema...or as has been the case in the last few years, to openly flirt with a more mainstream approach. Commercial cinema itself has become more open to social and political problems and preoccupations... (146-7)

Thoraval’s statement clearly indicates that both popular and art cinema’s borders in India are blurred as they borrow each others’ ascribed narrative techniques, resulting in a “middle path” between the two. Mumbai self-admittedly takes this “middle path”.

Stylistically Mumbai displays a mixture of art and commercial narrative qualities. It features none of the dances or extravagant costumes associated with popular Hindi films, instead favouring a style of gritty and sombre realism (Martin-Jones 2011, 207, 216; Virdi 2003, 2). It does contain one song montage, however, which unites the characters as non-diegetic lyrics reflect the characters’ moods (see Chapter Four 121). But this scene is not presented in typical “Bollywood” fashion in which characters break out into song and/or are accompanied by choruses. The song montage thus illustrates a “middle path”, harnessing the popular trope of music to unite characters, but presenting it less spectacularly than mainstream films would. In terms of narrative structures popular Hindi films often strongly favour subplots and episodic structures (Martin-Jones 2011, 207), but “they abide by other realist conventions, such as cause-and-effect linear narratives, continuity editing, and spatial/temporal unity” (Virdi 2003, 2). Each of these qualities is evident in Mumbai. Being a network film Mumbai’s storylines are to some extents episodic, while it also presents a clear causal storyline with continuity editing. Successive intercuts between threads imply the stories’ temporal and spatial cohesion. Stylistically then, Mumbai contains a mixture of qualities attributed to India’s mainstream and art cinemas.

Narratively, Mumbai emphasises art cinema qualities, but politically reiterates mainstream techniques. It features realistic and somewhat downbeat stories, such as the death of Rupali’s fiancé, Kadam’s suicide attempt, social inequalities, and the trauma of the bombings (topics that are also addressed in the contemporary A Wednesday [Pandey 2008]). These are characteristics that help identify many Indian art films from the 1980s
and 1990s such as Salaam Bombay! (Nair 1988) and the Malayalam film Swaham (Karun 1994) (Thoraval 2000, 148-50, 172-4, 182, 188-9). Furthermore, Mumbai does not contain a central hero and heroine couple, in contrast to Virdi’s statement that popular “Hindi cinema’s narratives are unfailingly centered on a hero and heroine, who together constitute its fundamental templates in which masculinity is the flip side of femininity” (2003, 87). Looking at Mumbai’s narrative politics, however, it reiterates conservative patriarchal, heterosexual, familial and social politics common in popular Hindi cinema (14, 21, 33, 208).49 Mumbai favours patriarchal gender politics which victimise and marginalise the central female character and privilege the upper middle class male star (discussed in Chapter Three 92), and it courts the issue of but elides radical commentary on class and caste politics (88). Although Mumbai initially addresses important and serious social problems, it resorts to conservative, non-polyphonically presented narrative politics. Mumbai’s politics reflect Virdi’s observation that while popular films do frequently take up issues of class and religious conflicts (2003, 14, 11), they tend to “elide” the controversial issue of caste and resolve their narrative problems with simple pleas for peace and national unity or, as Virdi puts it, “homogeneity” (209, 33, 10). Mumbai also privileges narrative closure and the resolution of moral and ethical problems, tropes found in many popular Hindi films (21, 32; see Chapter Six 199-200). Yet it does to some extents emphasise the open-ended possibilities of the characters’ newly-learnt lessons and experiences. To this degree Mumbai offers closure that is midway between Indian popular cinema’s neat resolutions and art cinema’s open-endedness. Ultimately, in terms of production, aesthetics and narrative workings, Mumbai’s illustration of this “middle path” indicates that the borders between popular and art cinema in India are purposefully blurred.

**Indonesian Cinema and Love for Share**

Whereas Mumbai shows an art film industry adopting mainstream techniques in order to boost its struggling status, Love is part of a burgeoning independent film industry in Indonesia which capitalises on popular narrative techniques. Previously relatively local and periodically insular (Heider 18-19), in recent years Indonesian cinema is expanding in terms of narrative innovation and varieties of film types (Heryanto 2004, 29; Heider 19). Indonesian cinema’s narrative styles and ideologies are

49 A further case for the blurring of borders could be made as Thoraval (2000) notes that relatively liberal depictions of sexuality in recent popular films are shocking conservative viewers (140).
commonly said to reflect the country’s changes in government and cultural influence. These include: the influences of Dutch funding up until World War II; propaganda during the Japanese occupation; close censorship of liberal themes during Sukarno’s presidency from 1945-1967; similar strict censorship and the celebration of patriarchal and conservative politics during Suharto’s “New Order” from 1976-1998 (Heider 14-18); and narrative and political experimentation under the democratic governments since 1998.

Contemporary independent cinema in Indonesia complicates an easy division between concepts of “art cinema” and “mainstream cinema”. Since Suharto’s resignation it is widely agreed that Indonesian cinema has begun to reflect liberal qualities (Heryanto 2004; Paramaditha 2007; Aartsen 2011; Sharpe 2002). At the same time, there is a significant amount of overlap between the independent and mainstream fields in Indonesian filmmaking (Sharpe 2002). Until the late 1990s independent Indonesian cinema was distributed at a grassroots level, as “films were taken from one district to another and screened on walls, or sometimes bed sheets” to avoid state censorship (Heeren 2009, 72). In contrast, films released during the early 2000s by filmmakers such as Di Nata, Riri Riza, Nan Triveni Achnas, and Rudy Soedjarwo have had both critical and commercial success, and reflect both “mainstream” and “art cinema” narrative elements (Sharpe 2002). In a (non-paginated) 2002 article titled “Eliana Eliana: Independent Cinema, Indonesian Cinema: A new wave of Indonesian films”, Joanne Sharpe explains that these filmmakers do not mind this overlap between “art cinema” and “mainstream cinema” because “the Indonesian audience has been starved of Indonesian film”. In order to nourish this lack filmmakers “are being forced to be alternative in the way they produce and distribute their films”. In order to attract audiences, independent filmmakers in Indonesia tend to concentrate on national themes, and draw on both mainstream and art cinema aids in order to make “films of artistic and personal credibility”. For instance, Di Nata’s Arisan!, Saputra’s Virgin (2005), and Soedjarwo’s What’s Up With Love? (2002) deal with social controversies and romance in serious, melodramatic, and comedic veins (see Schmidt 2012, 32).

50 The amount of films made in Indonesia has fluctuated over the decades, with sharp drops during the 1950s and 1990s, but a boom during the 1980s and an increasing amount from the early 2000s under Megawati’s neoliberal presidency which has been superseded by Yudhoyono’s presidency.

51 Further illustrating flexibility between fields, Riza has directed both a children’s film Sherina’s Adventure (2000) and the experimental, poignant film Eliana, Eliana (2002).
Following in the heels of *Arisan!*, Di Nata’s *Love* also uses a mixture of comic and serious narrative elements, and its celebrity cast adds commercial as well as artistic appeal (see Chapter Seven 238-9). As well as these commercially appealing aspects, *Love* uses techniques commonly associated with art cinema. For example, blogger Ari Purnama (2011), discussing the omnibus film *Belkibolang* (Edwin et al. 2011), asserts that filmmakers in this independent movement “experiment with loose storytelling structure, ambiguous ending [sic], stylistic embellishment and other strategies that art cinema is known for”. *Love*’s visual style and narrative structure certainly reflects a “loose storytelling structure”, open-endedness, and visual embellishment in the coloured filters (see Chapter Six 196-7). Notably, these elements strongly resemble the qualities ascribed to independent and art cinemas of other nations as described earlier in this chapter. *Love* is evidently situated in a period and film movement in which notional boundaries between mainstream and art cinema are permeable.

Narratively and politically, *Love* displays aspects which further signal permeability between the categorical terms “art cinema” and “mainstream cinema”. The New Order period is closely (although as Hanan [2008] argues it should not be entirely) associated with patriarchal, homophobic, and non-feminist ideologies, as well as discrimination against Chinese Indonesians (Hanan 2008, 3; Heider 29, 34, 118; Sulistyani 2011, 169). Ariel Heryanto (2004), Intan Paramaditha (2007), Haspari Dwiningtyas Sulistyani (2011), and others have observed that post New Order cinema has worked to redress these aspects. Discussing this more liberal period, both Heryanto (2004, 29) and Paramaditha (2007) note the prominence of women both in the film industry and in narratives; Paramaditha claims that the nation is in the process of “reconceptualiz[ing] its identity in terms of ethnic, religion, gender, and class” (2007); and Heryanto argues that “Since 1998…Chinese Indonesians and their civil predicaments have become not only a common theme in contemporary…films. They have in fact been one of the most popular themes” (2004, 36). *Love* reflects this liberal approach as it focuses on female characters who are independent and, in Siti and Ming’s case, sexually self-aware. Di Nata’s position as a female director also underscores the increased prominence of women in Indonesian filmmaking. *Love*’s representation of Ming as a likeable and ethical character rebuts earlier stereotypes of Chinese Indonesians (see Chapter Three 88), while Siti’s lesbian relationship is portrayed positively, challenging mainstream New Order tropes (88). In these ways *Love* suits the label of innovative, independent art cinema, which is resistant to national hegemony.
At the same time, it is arguable that *Love* embraces mainstream narrative politics and is in fact not particularly radical in its resistance to the state’s political hegemony. Schmidt (2012) compellingly claims that the film “serves a specific national function” (45) by “teach[ing] women how to be a good citizen” (45). Schmidt observes that “*Love* negotiates and offers women a ‘right’ kind of modern Indonesian identity which is resting on the pillars of the family and Islam” (36). Similarly, in Chapter Three (87) I observed that *Love*, while seeking to project a positive multicultural cross section, does so by relying on and in some instances reinstating stereotypes and patriarchal values in relation to Siti and Ming’s characterisations. Thereby as an example of independent cinema, *Love* is not as radical as the label might suggest.

*Love*’s narrative politics and its contexts in the independent film movement complicate the conditions of the term “national cinema”. Challenging the idea of “national cinema” as cinema that contrasts with Hollywood, in an unpublished 2011 thesis, Jossy Aartsen likens Indonesia’s independent film movement to that of other countries, but emphasises that the films aim to counter the New Order rather than Hollywood’s ideologies (21). Recounting the independent movement’s success, Sharpe (2002) claims that “Independent film has become National film, and the independent voice has become a national voice on the big screen”. Sharpe’s claim equates national cinema with both mainstream and independent filmmaking, rather than either one or the other. The term “national cinema” in relation to Indonesian filmmaking thereby infers overlap between “art cinema” and “mainstream” influences. Reflecting this complication, *Love* points to the inappropriate implication of homogeneity in the term “national cinema”. For instance, Di Nata’s American education (see Chapter Seven 217) situates her in many people’s eyes as a non-local, arguably “interventionist” filmmaker (Hanan personal conversation [2011]). *Love*’s representation of a multicultural society emphasises the country’s pluralism, as opposed to the hegemonic representations associated with the New Order. On the other hand, while critiquing the nationally state-condoned practice of polygamy, politically *Love* provides a hegemonic message for women (Schmidt 2012, 45). *Love* thereby illustrates ways in which the term “national cinema” infers contradictory meanings within Indonesian cinema, while narratively and politically it merges qualities typically credited as divisive between “mainstream” and “art cinema”.
It is also significant that, in relation to the problematic nature of the term “national cinema”, *Love* uses intertextual references which include globally popular Chinese and multinational films. *Love* refers to Chinese blockbusters such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Hero* which have been successful internationally almost on a scale to match Hollywood’s (Lee 2003, 282-3; Lau 2007). Ming wants to be the next Ziyi Zhang, but significantly not the next Gong Li (see Chapter Three fn. 26). Ming’s preferred actress Zhang is the younger and sexier idol, as her appearances in magazines such as Taiwan’s April 2001 edition of *FHM* attest. The fact that these actresses have appeared in both Hollywood and Chinese films point out a dialogue between the industries. Nevertheless Zhang and Li’s stereotyped and culturally controversial appearances in films like *Rush Hour 2* and *Memoirs of a Geisha* do not escape tropes of Hollywood’s cultural imperialism (see K. Chan 2009, 6). In referencing these Chinese blockbusters and actresses, *Love* appeals to an idea of Indonesian cinema as partner to these industries just as Ming’s Chinese heritage is constitutive within Indonesian society. *Love* also makes a reference to *Moulin Rouge!*, which also presents non-monogamous relationships as undesirable (Figure 8.1). *Moulin Rouge!* influenced strongly by popular Hindi cinema, is another multinational coproduction that became a global blockbuster (see Gopal and Moorti 2011; Bhaumik 2006). Similar to its representation of exchange between Indonesian and Chinese cinemas, in referencing this multinational blockbuster *Love* positions itself as part of a global cinema conversation. *Love*’s references thereby relate Indonesian cinema to an international cinematic discourse surrounding the increasingly permeable quality of national identities.

Figure 8.1
While labelled an “art film” and an “independent” film, *Love* conveys mixed messages which complicate the attributes commonly associated with these labels. Whereas Mumbai’s mixture of art and mainstream narrative techniques is in answer to the failing profitability of art cinema, *Love*’s mixture is inspired by a rich post New Order environment of experimentation and freedom within the film industry. *Love* contains simultaneously conservative and rebellious messages, it uses a slow narrative pace but an easygoing comedic tone, and it self-referentially positions Indonesian cinema amongst popular and multinational world cinemas. These elements suggest that we need to revise common understandings of art, mainstream, independent, and national cinemas, as the borders blur in both specific and comparable ways amongst different international film industries.

**Australian Cinema and *Lantana***

*Lantana* is a prime example of Australian art cinema, seemingly supporting the conception that art cinema and mainstream are divisively contrasting. Australian cinema is a moderately sized industry (O’Regan 1996, 1) which produces a range of genre films, comedies, and domestic dramas that are usually identified as art films. *Lantana* exemplifies the latter group, as it is reliant on state funding, concerns serious topics, and presents a realistic narrative and visual style. Its themes of multicultural tensions, including those between Aboriginal, Anglo, and non-Anglo Australians affirms David Callahan’s assertion that in Australian cinema “the central issue is that of belonging” (2001, 97). As in other Australian “art” films which deal seriously with the topic of Australian identity and relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal characters, the trope of landscape as a representative of these tensions (Collins and Davis 2004, 7, 19) is present in *Lantana* (see Duncanson 2009). *Lantana*’s focus on domestic and emotional problems experienced by lower middle class families resembles the subjects of art films such as *Shine* (Hicks 1996), *Two Hands* (Jordan 1999), and *The Quiet Room* (de Heer 1996). These qualities are also emulated in subsequent acclaimed films such as

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52 The industry has significantly profited with genres such as horror (*Wolf Creek* [Mclean 2005]), musicals (*The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* [Elliot 1994; see Brophy [2008], in particular 80], *Bran Nu Dae* [Perkins 2009]) and historical period pieces (*The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* [Schepisi 1978], *Picnic at Hanging Rock* [Weir 1975]).

53 Within Australia, although Hollywood films dominate, French (2001) notes that during the 1990s there was an increase in the number of arthouse cinemas being built, and subsequently an increase in the number of non-Hollywood films being shown (32).
Little Fish (Woods 2005), Candy (Armfield 2006), and The Black Balloon (Down 2008). Lantana also dwells on themes of masculinity that are recurrent in Australian cinema (Butterss 2001, 92). Its downbeat and open ending, its realistic portrait of suburban life in Sydney, and its visually sombre and non-touristic compositions, further conform to the attributes associated with art cinema.

Yet while Lantana is a particularly sensitive, downbeat, and nuanced film, it raises questions about how art films are defined and appraised. As discussed in Chapters Three through Six, Lantana’s closure, narrative politics and narrative style use conservative and mainstream as well as art cinema techniques. It provides a strong sense of closure, suggesting that most of the characters are set on particular predictable trajectories (see Chapter Three 94-5); reiterates conservative politics in favouring patriarchal ideology and perpetuating a marginalisation of cultural others (82-3); and tells its story in ways which at first suggest ambiguity but ultimately resolve the narrative mysteries (see Chapter Six 203-4). Lantana’s cast list is notable because of its mix of actors of different international standing. A member of the trend of “Australians in Hollywood”, Geoffrey Rush is known for his roles in Hollywood films (Pirates of the Caribbean) as well as Australian films (Shine, Candy), and Anthony LaPaglia is similarly known for his presence in US movies and television shows such as Empire Records (Moyle 1995) and Murder One (Bochco 2005) (Ebert 2002). The presence of American actress Barbara Hershey in this Australian film is emphasised as a foreign one, similar to Laura Linney’s role in the director’s subsequent film Jindabyne (Lawrence 2006). Lantana dwells on the theme of Australia as a place of foreigners and outsiders, but marginalises non-hegemonic characters (see Chapter Three 82-3). This multicultural theme emphasises a “glocal” perspective (Ritzer 2003), questioning how globalisation affects the nation and citizens’ relationships. To a lesser extent than in Mumbai and Love, Lantana narratively undermines the conception of “national cinema” as easily identifiable and insular, although it also resembles many other Australian art films. Yet Lantana’s mixture of qualities associated with both mainstream and art cinema problematises the definition of art cinema as progressive and culturally superior to mainstream films (O’Regan 1996, 334; M. D. Ryan 2010, 848).

In summary while Lantana is recognisable as an Australian film which takes up local issues and addresses themes particular to other Australian films, the film’s narrative politics illustrates some of the ways in which the belief that national art films
use particular tropes is misguided. *Lantana* rests in between the poles of arthouse cinema and mainstream cinema, sidling a little closer to the arthouse pole than *Mumbai* but a little more to the mainstream than *Love* with its controversial depiction of polygamy. Rather than conveying outright radical politics, a markedly innovative audiovisual style, or a distinct lack of closure, *Lantana* repeats such tropes in diluted and to some extent superficial ways. It conveys ultimately non-radical politics (although not extremely conservative); an unusual yet not unprecedented audiovisual style; and a sense of closure which suggests open-endedness and ambiguity but affirms a stereotypical social hierarchy. *Lantana* therefore problematises the binary division between the definitions of arthouse and mainstream cinema. Thus far, *Mumbai, Love* and *Lantana* each, in different ways, complicate and blur the divisions between mainstream, art and independent cinemas.

**European Cinema and Code Unknown**

It is widely acknowledged that *Code Unknown* conforms to the common definition of European cinema as a cinema that narratively, stylistically, and ideologically opposes Hollywood cinema (see Galt 2010, 234-5). Haneke’s film affirms claims made that European art cinema privileges ambiguity (Schrader qtd. in Elsaesser 2005, 44; see Chapter Five 162-3), realism (Panek 2006, 86; Chapter Five 150-51), a lack of clarity and causal transparency, and open-endedness (Crofts 1993, 29; see Chapter Six 207-8). Haneke’s *auteur* reputation (Wheatley 2009, 28-31) and self-confessed commitment to portraying human experiences realistically and fragmentarily rather than omnisciently as in mainstream cinemas (Bordwell [1979] 2002, 94-7) satisfy typical definitions of European art cinema. *Code Unknown* therefore fits the bill of art cinema and more generally European art cinema.

However, *Code Unknown* also draws attention to the question of whether the terms “art cinema” and “national cinema” are ill-defined and unfairly biased. Although stylistically and narratively positioned strongly in opposition to mainstream cinemas, critiques of *Code Unknown*’s narrative politics draw attention to the unfair bias shown towards art cinema in contrast to the criticism given to mainstream films (O’Regan 1996, 334). This is similar to the ways in which *Mumbai, Love*, and *Lantana* illustrate narrative politics which would in mainstream films be subject to harsh review. While *Code Unknown* has been praised for presenting a portrait of Europe that realistically
highlights social inequalities (Sharrett 2006; Wheatley 2009; Rhodes 2006), Rosalind Galt critiques the way in which it draws on a popular conception of the Balkans as Western Europe’s other. In the film images of violence rooted in the Balkans are juxtaposed against the violence in Paris, presenting a limiting analogy of an embattled fortress Europe. Galt argues that in doing so, Haneke presents the Balkans “not as a real place but as a metaphor for Europe’s Other” (2010, 225) and represents a simplistic idea of Europe through inadequate and stereotypical signifiers. She writes:

Indeed, as the film of Haneke’s that most directly speaks ‘about’ Europe, it may also be the least successful in analyzing it. Its narrative of multiculturalism is precisely the discourse on Europe that is unable to grasp the inadequacy of ventriloquizing the West’s Others. Thus, the overt narrative on immigration and race actively resists the film’s more radical impulses. (228)

Galt’s criticism here illustrates that “art cinema” can be accused of similar political problems as those of mainstream films. This is in contrast to the view that “art cinema” is culturally superior to mainstream films, a view that leads to unfair standards of criticism for both types of cinema (O’Regan 1996, 334). As do the other case studies discussed, Code Unknown’s narrative politics highlight problems involved in the perceived distinction between art cinema and mainstream cinema.

*Code Unknown* also raises questions about the definition of the term “European art cinema” and the implications that “national cinema” is equivalent to “art cinema”. Importantly, the term “European” is a broad signifier with uncertain borders, both physically and in terms of narrative identity. Illustrating this, France, Germany, and Romania provided *Code Unknown*’s funding, but the narrative also includes French African and African characters, one of whom we see in the former French colony Mali. This raises the question of whether it might also be identified as a partially “African” film, and not entirely “European”. Moreover, at the time of its production Romania did not belong to the European Union, bringing further contestation to *Code Unknown*’s “European” label. Within academia similar questions are often raised about whether films from Eastern Europe and non-EU countries “count” as European films in this vein (Iordanova 2003; Elsaesser 2005, 14-15, 492). In the Western locus, questions also abound about whether films made in the UK are “European films” because their use of English reduces the linguistic friction with Hollywood implied in the term “European cinema” (Crofts 1993, 27; Elsaesser 2005, 13-14, 62-63; Cooke 2007a, 9; Higson 2000,
Furthermore, transnational and international EU coproductions refigure the identity of “Europeanness” and national cinemas (Bergfelder 2005, 323; Elsaesser 2005, 36-55, 60-4). Since globalisation and the formation of the European Union has led to more permeable borders, Galt notes that European cinema, it seems, experiences a…structural dilemma: how to become European – as opposed to simply continuing an older model of national cinemas – without degenerating into the filmic correlative of Brussels bureaucracy, the Europudding. (2006, 2)

The concept of European cinema is thus highly contentious. These questions and factors all draw attention to the conflicting notions implied by the term “European” cinema, an issue that Code Unknown demonstrates.

Showing all the hallmarks of European cinema as it is commonly understood, Haneke’s Code Unknown illuminates issues which underlie such conceptual divides between national, art, and mainstream cinema. Similar to the films discussed above, Code Unknown points to the issue that the different fields of cinema are rarely analysed on equal grounds. Having throughout this thesis subjected Code Unknown to symptomatic analysis usually conducted on popular rather than art cinema (O’Regan 1996, 334), it appears that the two supposedly contrasting categories of art and mainstream cinemas both contain problems of culturally biased narrative politics. Even in Code Unknown, one of the clearest cases in which the national and art cinema is privileged in network films, this film still pertinently highlights insufficiencies in the terms of analysis regarding art cinema. Furthermore, Code Unknown’s identity as a coproduction provokes questions about the instability and inaccuracy of the definitions of “national cinema” and “European cinema”. In different ways to Mumbai, Love, and Lantana, Code Unknown also points to the inaccuracy of the terms “art cinema”, “mainstream cinema”, and “national cinema”, as these categories are increasingly hazy and porous.

Turkish German Cinema and The Edge of Heaven

Edge shows many of the narrative qualities typically associated with European art cinema. This supports the frequent association of Turkish German cinema with the same types of narrative conditions as European art cinema (see Higson 2002, 59; Betz
Edge shows less recourse to conservative mainstream patriarchal politics as found in the Indian, Indonesian, or Australian art films discussed earlier. For example, its somewhat optimistic, somewhat ambiguous conclusion retains an open-endedness that is, according to Bordwell, characteristic of European art cinema ([1979] 2002, 99; see Chapter Five 148). Its triptych network format is also organic, unpredictable, and realistic rather than plot-driven. Edge’s audiovisual style is characteristic of Akin’s oeuvre as a transnational auteur (see Mennel 2009; Rings 2008, 22-26), and Akin’s conscious decision to avoid narrative gimmicks and instead focus on character psychology (see Chapter Seven 214-5) reiterates the notion of European art cinema as oppositional to mainstream films. Edge’s celebrity actors mainly connote art cinema backgrounds, although Nurgül Yesilçay is well known from popular Turkish television shows Troublesome Sister-in-law (Aksoy 2005) and Angel Island (Ergin 2004-2005). Nevertheless all the actors’ appearances in Edge emphasise realistic and artistic performances (see Chapter Three 105, 107). Edge therefore seems to fit the category of European art cinema.

However, viewing Edge as a European art film overlooks the importance of the film’s transnationalism. Labelled a “transnational” Turkish German film rather than a “coproduction” as Code Unknown is, Edge problematises the term “national cinema”. Transnational filmmaking in general destabilises essentialist perspectives on national cinemas (Halle 2008, 87). Turkish German cinema and Edge in particular challenge the boundaries of Europe, placing Germany and Turkey in dialogic rather than oppositional relations. For example, in taking up the issue of Turkey’s accession to the European Union and referring to global connections beyond the European Union’s borders (see Chapter Two 60), Edge questions whether Europe’s borders are merely conceptual and not tangible. It features renowned actors from Turkish, German, and Turkish German cinema in roles that intertextually denote Turkey and Germany’s intertwined history. It shows characters speaking, reading, and listening to multiple languages, drawing attention to the fact that language need not be a sign of national identity. Edge thereby affirms Randall Halle’s statement that “transnational films problematize the use of language” (85, original emphasis). Edge’s identity as a Turkish German film and its explicit questioning of the insularity and perforations of European borders thereby undermine the totalising implications of the term “European art film”.
Yet while *Edge* complicates the idea of the national, care should be taken not to let the terms “transnational cinema” or “Turkish German cinema” become prescriptive or essentialist. Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim (2010) ask does the focus on a term such as the ‘transnational’ simply risk becoming a replacement for existing terms such as ‘world cinema’ as a means of merely describing non-Anglophone films? (17)

Depending on how it is used, the term “transnational cinema” may circumscribe films in ways which may limit rather than describe them adequately. Halle similarly argues that “…the transnational aesthetic does not undo national differences but rather highlights them and heightens sensitivity to cultural specificity” (2008, 86, original emphasis). It is important to note, then, that *Edge* counterposes German and Turkish iconography and history, drawing attention to the frictions as well as parallels between them (see Chapter Four 133). At the same time, raising again the question of how art films are valued as progressive (see Chapter One 34-5), *Edge* can be seen to draw on cultural stereotypes (see Chapter Three 80), and to some degree it depicts Turkey as a site of spiritual rejuvenation in contrast to Germany’s frigid alienation (see Chapter Six 177). While it conveys a more positive message of transnational relationships than other Turkish German films such as *Yasemin* and *40m2 Deutschland* (see Göktürk 2002; Rings 2008), *Edge*’s symbolic proposition in Susanne and Ayten’s reconciliation that Germany be a maternal caregiver to a naïve and repentant Turkey is one which perpetuates unequal power relationships between the two countries. Thereby *Edge* exhibits some problematic narrative politics similar to those of *Code Unknown*, once again reminding us that art films deserve “symptomatic criticism” as much as mainstream films do (O’Regan 1996, 334). Rather than allowing *Edge* to be pigeonholed into a singular category, close attention to its transnational perspectives show it to be unique in its cultural and cinematic relationships. Simultaneously, in narratively expanding and challenging the limits of national borders, *Edge* draws attention to the limitations of categorical terms such as “European cinema” and “art cinema”. We have seen how *Mumbai* shows “Bollywood” and Indian art cinema to opportunistically intermingle; *Love* shows Indonesian independent cinema to embrace multiple approaches to narrative in is recent boom; *Lantana* shows Australian art cinema to deserve similar criticism to that of mainstream cinema; and *Code Unknown* shows the identity problems involved in coproductions and the term “European cinema”. *Edge* also points to exchanges between different cinema categories, and further illustrates that cinema of all types is deserving
of symptomatic criticism. It further undermines the hegemonic implications of the terms “national cinema” and “European cinema”, drawing critical attention to global constituencies and the intangibility of national and categorical borders.

**Independent American Cinema and Crash**

Determining where *Crash* sits on the spectrum between art cinema, independent cinema and Hollywood cinema highlights the inconsistent nature of these categories. As noted earlier, commentators sometimes describe *Crash* as a “Hollywood” film (Chapter Seven 234). Yet in terms of its financial backing and initial distribution through film festivals, *Crash* is an independent film.\(^5^4\) In relation to the American independent/Hollywood divide, Alan Williams (2002) explains that

> On one end, there is the capital-intensive, increasingly faceless ‘global’ cinema of the related ‘action film’ genres. On the other end, there is the low-budget, film festival-oriented ‘art,’ ‘independent,’ or ‘auteur’ cinema; this sector may properly be termed ‘international’. (18)

As a supposed opposing or alternative school to Hollywood, independent American cinema is positioned to articulate radical politics, give voice to minorities, experiment with narrative conventions, draw influences from beyond Hollywood, and present complex rather than merely entertaining perspectives (6). Hollywood, in contrast, is usually described in terms of its balancing act between business, entertainment and art. Shohini Chaudhuri (2005) states that

> Entertainment cinema is characterised by the forms of textual continuity upon which it relies. For example, the key characteristics of Hollywood film [*sic*] are fast-paced linear narratives, goal-motivated protagonists, stars, narrative closure and, increasingly in the present age, big budgets, special effects and spectacular action. This is the broad narrative genre that Hollywood industry insiders believe has ‘universal’ appeal across the world. (7)

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\(^{5^4}\) The artistic merit of festival films can be drawn into question, however. Elsässer (2005, 82, 88, 100-101) and Naficy (2010) suggest that film festivals have led to product tailoring comparable with Hollywood practices. In order to assure popularity, filmmakers may try to make similar films to previous successful examples. And festival audiences and judges arguably favour those films whose elements they find familiar. These factors potentially lead to the diminution of the experimental and original potential which independent cinema is supposed to offer.
Hollywood’s aim of making a profit is equated with making films for “the lowest common denominator” audience, hence making films for entertainment rather than artistic merit (see Davies and Wells 2002, 11-12). Accordingly, Hollywood is criticised for (instilling) conservative politics, narratives which perpetuate the marginalisation of minority groups, stories which present life simplistically and problems which are unrealistically easy to resolve (A. Williams 2002, 18). Hollywood-produced films have saturated many cinema markets around the world, and so the industry is often criticised as an imperial colonising force (Elsaesser 2005, 466).

Commentators’ claims that Crash is more a Hollywood than “indie” film are no doubt drawing on these qualifiers. Crash thereby signals indeterminacy in the borders between “art cinema” and “mainstream cinema”, complicating the notion that independent films are intellectually and politically more rigorous than Hollywood films. On the one hand, Crash tries very hard to present a serious critique of systemic racism, a social problem which Hollywood is often accused of ignoring and/or fuelling (Beltrán 2005, 51-52; see Bernadi 2008). However, Hollywood’s reputation as a conservative mythmaker can be and is occasionally questioned (see Cooke 2007b; deWaard 2007, 18), as, for instance, Hollywood classics such as 12 Angry Men (Lumet 1957) and From Here to Eternity (Zinnemann 1953) are equally sombre and politically topical. This highlights the inadequacy of the binary association of social controversy to “art films” and a lack of it to Hollywood films. Furthermore, its casting of stars such as Sandra Bullock and Brendan Fraser and actors familiar from Hollywood films and/or popular television shows such as E.R. and The Sopranos in “serious” roles rather than comedic or romantic ones illustrates Wong’s observation that “Festival films…transform actors, deconstructing stardom and yet in incorporating its allures” (2011, 83). Nonetheless, this factor, closely related to a defining point of art cinema, is one which is inherently based on blurring borders between the mainstream and non-mainstream.

On the other hand, Crash’s narrative is quite linear and fast-paced and thereby arguably more akin to mainstream filmmaking (Chaudhuri 2005, 7), and its narrative politics are conservative, often regressive. For instance, the use of character parallels fulfil narrative qualities of mainstream films, as they aid continuity and narrative closure (see Chapter Five 154-5). The film also produces racial and gender stereotyping, and reaffirms dominant patriarchal and Anglo-Amercicentric ideology (see Chapters Three through Six). Crash’s closure mitigates the realistic critique of racism and
prejudice it purported to engage, and thereby demonstrates conservative mainstream narrative techniques (see Chapter Five 165-6). In effect, while produced and marketed as an independent film, and while addressing social issues prevalent in art cinema, Crash uses narrative politics and techniques associated with mainstream filmmaking. Although Haggis strongly identifies his work in contrast to the conservative mainstream (Beiser 2012), Crash represents a mixture of both camps, with decidedly more endorsement of conservative politics. These aspects illustrate the confusion present in the definitions of independent, art and mainstream cinemas, particularly in relation to narrative politics.

The contradictions concerning whether Crash belongs to the category of “independent cinema” or “Hollywood cinema” illustrate an important trend occurring in contemporary American filmmaking. Similar to the blurring of borders for the sake of profitability and credibility seen in the case of Indian cinemas, both Hollywood films and independent films in America have been seen to borrow attributes from one another (Bordwell 2008, 200). In relation to Crash it is notable that this independently financed film gained mainstream recognition and acclaim, evident in its Oscar Award for the best film of 2006. Crash’s popularity and its mainstream narrative qualities challenge the notion that independent cinema is artistic and therefore diametrically opposed to a dogma of popular entertainment that the term “Hollywood” connotes. Reflecting this situation, Paul Cooke asks

to what extent is the ‘Hollywood equals popular culture’ versus ‘non-Hollywood equals high culture’ dichotomy sustainable in actuality? Popular entertainment films are made the world over … [for example, in India and Hong Kong]. Moreover, it is a dichotomy that has been troubled in recent years by the rise of the American ‘indie’. Although limited, there clearly is a market for ‘art house’ films in the United States. (2007a, 3)

Hollywood’s status as the major mainstream cinema versus “other” “world cinemas” is thereby challenged in view of the comparable popularity of non-Hollywood cinemas within and beyond America. Therein the borders between Hollywood and independent cinema, and Hollywood and art cinema, become blurred.

In relation to the question of whether the term “national cinema” remains useful, Crash’s identity as a popular independent American film draws attention to an important contradiction in the common understanding of “world cinema”. Independent
American cinema is often contrasted to Hollywood cinema as a film industry which concentrates on local and national stories, whereas Hollywood films, as Alan Williams describes, are perceived as “faceless” and “global” (2002, 18). This implies that while Hollywood competes against other “national” cinemas, it itself is not counted as a “national cinema”, being instead a cinema which promotes universal rather than local stories (Halle 2008, 27, 84; Rosenbaum 2002, 217-18). In contrast, American independent cinema occupies the default position of a “national cinema” by its perceived position as Hollywood’s alternative. Supporting this association, Crash does focus on identity politics and questions of social belonging within a specific location, citing national problems of racial relations. Yet, similar to Lantana and Edge, in doing so, Crash also renders the implied homogeneity of the term “national” problematic, as it too shows a multicultural society in which identity politics result in much conflict and confusion. Nonetheless, as Chapter Three discussed, Crash ultimately presents a patriarchal, Anglo-Amercicentric message about the unity of Los Angeles. Similarly, many independent or “indie” films such as Magnolia and Robert Altman’s Short Cuts use conservative social cross sections of characters of similar classes and/or cultures (Goss 2002, 183; see Bordwell 2008a, 218-19; Sonce 2002, 358-64). These narrative politics affirm scholars’ arguments that independent American cinema borrows significantly from Hollywood narrative conventions (King 2009; Bordwell 2008a, 218). This perceived overlap unsettles the clarity of whether independent cinema is truly oppositional to Hollywood. By extension the inability to clarify the borders between the two in terms of narrative conventions renders the application of the term “national cinema” to independent cinema but not to Hollywood cinema illogical. Crash thereby exposes some of the contradictions and limitations involved in the concept of “national cinema”.

As an independent film which uses mainstream narrative techniques and gained mainstream popularity, Crash thereby challenges the notion that “art cinemas” and “mainstream cinemas” are oppositional to one another. In relation to the term “world cinema”, Crash’s contexts, as do those of Mumbai, Love, Lantana, Code Unknown, and Edge, contest the term’s connotative positioning of Hollywood as a yardstick against which other cinemas compare. It draws attention to the problems involved in the understanding of “world cinema” as Hollywood vs. national cinemas, provoking a reconsideration of these concepts as mutually exclusive and definitive.
Multinational Filmmaking and *Babel*

The ambiguity regarding *Babel’s* Hollywood funding and art cinema narrative techniques illustrates confusion surrounding the differentiation between Hollywood and independent cinema to a greater degree than *Crash*. *Babel* is the product of a recent trend of Hollywood subsidised “specialty” studios that expand their funding and distribution ranges to permeate independent and multinational markets (King 2009; Tzioumakis 2008). Describing this trend, Crofts claims “Hollywood has developed its own art cinema” in the form of semi-independent films (1993, 29). Hollywood-funded and Hollywood-star films are increasingly screened and compete at film festivals, lending them the prestige of art cinema (Wong 2011, 6). Some have seen this to be a sign of innovation. For instance, Halle argues “Hollywood has learned to incorporate formal and stylistic innovations into its most spectacular blockbuster films”, challenging the assumption that Hollywood cinema is not innovative or “artistic” in its narrative techniques (2008, 40). More often, this trend is greeted with criticism, seen to be another move in Hollywood’s cultural and financial global imperialism (Cooke 2007a, 3-4; Naficy 2008, 2010, 18; Davies 2005; Scott 2002, 2004). Similarly, in relation to Hollywood funded network films, many critics accuse Hollywood of copying and simplifying the heretofore “artistic” network form. These accusations are common in reviews and critiques of romantic comedies *Valentine’s Day* and *He’s Just Not That Into You* (Ebert 2010; Berardinelli 2009). Regarding *Babel*, as a result of the “specialty studio” trend which entails narrative and stylistic cross-pollination, the labels “Hollywood” and “independent cinema” become problematic, as does Hollywood’s status as the “big other” to “world cinema”. These contexts necessitate a revision of the measures by which “Hollywood” and “independent” cinemas are described.

Representative of Hollywood’s extension into semi-independent “art cinema”, *Babel* contains a mixture of innovative and conservative narrative techniques and politics. On the one hand, it represents a type of new “cinema of globalization” or “global cinema”, with its multinational cast, crew, settings, and theme of global interconnectedness (Roberts 1998, 63; Zaniello 2007 qtd. in Shaw 2011, 13; Tierney 2009, 113). In this respect it may be labelled an art film because of its serious themes, its representation of cultural conflicts, its critique of American politics and the American immigration laws, and its cosmopolitan outlook and its initially independent funding. On the other hand, *Babel’s* depictions of characters are stereotyped and the
narrative hierarchically appraises the American characters over the others (discussed in Chapter Three); its marketing and camerawork privilege white Western actors in contrast to the relatively localised fame of the Japanese and Mexican actors (discussed in Chapters Seven and Three); the narrative techniques resemble the ambiguity and realism of art cinema but at the same time depends on a mainstream elucidation of narrative order (discussed in Chapter Five); the film uses orientalist visual techniques to portray non-Western characters as “others” (discussed in Chapter Three through Six); the convergence of the narrative threads conveys a mainstream tradition for narrative transparency (Hassapopoulou 2008) (detailed in Chapters Four and Five); and its closure provides a sense of comfort and catharsis associated with mainstream cinema. Furthermore, the film’s creators Inárritu and Arriaga have been “adopted” by Hollywood, raising questions about whether their autonomy has been compromised (see Chapter Seven). Despite Babel’s ambitions to the contrary, its narrative politics as well as its funding backgrounds suggests that it is more a mainstream than “art” film, although it is certainly an innovative example of specialty studio films.

Despite its specialty studio funding, Babel’s multinational aspects raise questions about whether it can be labelled as any particular national cinema. As noted in Chapter Seven (231-2), there is contention over whether to call it a Mexican film because of its directors’ nationality, or an American film because of its predominant source of funding. However, American cinema is rarely described as a national cinema, partly because the term “national cinema” connotes marginality whereas “Hollywood” often implies a style of filmmaking that “divests itself of specific national interest” (Halle 2008, 27, 84; Rosenbaum 2002, 217-18). At the same time its international input places Babel in a similar position to Haneke’s Code Unknown. One could conceivably argue that Babel’s multinational settings, multilingualism, casting of international actors, and the Mexican identity of its creators suggests a process of international filmmaking that points to the global connectedness and deterioration of borders. To some extents I support this possibility, yet I am wary of the fact that the film would not have had such scope without its Hollywood-funded studios. On the one hand, this suggests and the film narratively enacts tropes of Hollywood’s cultural imperialism. On the other hand, the narrative innovation and gestures toward cultural pluralism that the film signifies are noteworthy, although they may simply illustrate a more complex process of Hollywood imperialism. Such complexity challenges the notion that “world cinema” describes Hollywood as contrary to “other”, “national cinemas”. As “Hollywood” merges
finances and narrative politics with independent avenues, and while “independent” and “art” cinemas around the world use mainstream narrative politics, this intermingling undercuts the clarity of such terms.

This section has illustrated various ways in which the boundaries of national cinema, art cinema, and mainstream cinema are blurred in terms of the seven films’ industrial contexts and textual attributes. While each of them illustrates the ways in which such categories are porous, they do so in specific ways. Mumbai is an example of Indian art cinema’s struggle to survive via adopting elements popular in Hindi cinema. Love displays the experimentation and popularity of Indonesia’s independent cinema movement. Lantana demonstrates conservative narrative politics within Australian art cinema. Code Unknown fits descriptions of European art cinema but raises questions about the limitations of what constitutes “European” cinema. Edge is a clear example of transnational filmmaking and accordingly challenges notions of borders surrounding the idea of European cinema at the same time as reminding us of the need to resist a limiting definition of transnational cinema. Crash is an example of independent American cinema which problematises the association of independent cinema as resistant to mainstream politics. And Babel represents a union between Hollywood, independent, and multinational filmmaking that results in complex relationships of power and exchange within its narrative as well as production contexts. To some degree this blurring of borders amongst the seven films offers a utopian prospect of translatability between different cultures and representational traditions. To a further degree, however, the spectre of Hollywood imperialism looms large in terms of the seven films’ narrative politics and their opportunities for distribution and competition. Bordwell, for instance, claims that “in either the mainstream or independent movie, the interweaving of lives is likely to be governed by norms familiar from decades of American moviemaking” (2008a, 219). Yet it must be kept in mind that the “norms” informing the seven films differ from context to context, and this investigation has illustrated the specificity of each case study’s contexts while arguing that they belong to a global genre.

To some extent this chapter has consolidated Bordwell’s observation that many network films abide by their national cinematic heritage (2008a, 191; see this chapter 249), as each of the seven films exhibit qualities associated with their local cinema’s contexts. However, each of these cases also blurs the clear distinctions of the
Hollywood vs. national cinema divide and the mainstream vs. art cinema divide. Importantly, the network genre undergoes both glocal and grobal processes – that is, the globally-familiar genre is approached in localised ways (Ritzer 2003, 193), and it is increasingly recognisable and influential around the world (194). These findings affirm Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim’s argument that the connotations of the term “world cinema” need careful consideration and attention to cross pollinations rather than binary and exclusivist oppositions (2006, 6). As a global genre, network films highlight many of the problems involved in the binary connotations of the term “world cinema”.

**Beyond the “Art” Examples of Network Films**

This thesis has come to the conclusion that network films form a global genre, and this chapter has shown that the seven films to many extents correspond with their local cinema heritages as well as blurring the categories of national, popular, and art cinema. In order to see whether or not such blurring of categories occurs only in so-called “art films”, it is worth asking now, albeit briefly, how more clearly mainstream network films relate to these findings regarding narrative qualities.

Popular examples of network films, which often take the form of romantic comedies, show many of the narrative qualities of the seven examples which this thesis has deemed generic. These include social cross sections of strangers; serious themes relating to cultural pluralism; a syntax of network community; stylistic commonalities which enhance the theme of network community; plots which emphasise the contingency of character connections; and a spatialisation of network community. Mainstream network films also often project attributes associated with art cinema, in particular realism and social commentary. For instance, similar to *Code Unknown*, Cédric Klapisch’s popular French network film *Paris* ranges from lower class to wealthy characters and features a thread about an illegal immigrant. Likewise, visually and narratively projecting a realistic aesthetic, *He’s Just Not That Into You* contains

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55 I focus on their narrative qualities considering that their industry backgrounds are usually well-financed and associated with mainstream productions. Nonetheless, some mainstream examples also blur the boundaries of conceptions of mainstream and non-mainstream cinema in terms of their production backgrounds. For instance *He’s Just Not That Into You* was funded by the cross-over specialist New Line Cinema and by Drew Barrymore’s independent company Flower Films (II), yet its cast of A list Hollywood stars (including Barrymore) bring it Hollywood appeal.
intermittent scenes that show “ordinary” people being interviewed. In these interviews characters and people who have nothing to do with the central narratives appear naturalistic and unglamorous. They provide realistic interludes which bolster the films’ appeal as not simply a romantic fantasy but as a realistic depiction of contemporary relationship issues. Furthermore, these mainstream examples occasionally reference real world events in order to affirm their claim to realism. Love Actually contains multiple sombre and significant references to 9/11, as well as containing a few unhappy and open endings alongside its happily-concluded threads (although even the unhappy endings are affirmative as characters are shown to be coping well with their problems). These instances support the argument that network films of both mainstream and non-mainstream production backgrounds textually blur such categories.

As many would expect, mainstream examples tend to use more conservative narrative politics than the seven case studies. Romantic comedies made for mainstream Anglo markets like Love Actually, Valentine’s Day, New Year’s Eve and He’s Just Not That Into You feature mostly conservative, white and upper middle class cross sections without many central non-white characters. Paris similarly subsumes its social critique within a “Eurooptimist” fantasy of happy endings. And the popular Hindi network films Life in a Metro and Yuva both convey conservative politics despite their attention to social problems such as poverty and political corruption. Nevertheless, these mixtures of narrative complexity and conservative representational politics reflect similar mixtures found in the seven case studies. On one hand, the prevalence of conservative politics in mainstream examples concurs with Bordwell’s assertions that mainstream and art cinema examples of network films continue in their respective narrative traditions (2008a, 191). It also confirms Naficy’s complaint that the mainstream is appropriating innovative narrative techniques (2010, 18-19). On the other hand, the narrative and stylistic innovations in these films are noteworthy. They encourage a view of the categories of “art cinema” and “mainstream cinema” as engaging in processes of mutual influence as well as contrast. A study of the relationships between mainstream and non-mainstream examples of network films could conceivably reveal many more problems and interesting relationships within this apparent global genre.

This section, and on the whole this chapter, have shown how categorical divisions are in fact not clear cut since there are many ways in which the different
narrative traditions overlap. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to keep in mind Elsaesser’s assertion that

…rather than letting all the boundaries begin to blur when trying to define the attractions and current uses of the term “world cinema,” it is useful to remind oneself of the modes of production typical of world cinema. (2005, 502)

At the same time as sharing narrative qualities which blur the definitions of “art” and “mainstream” cinemas, network films have very different production backgrounds and processes of distribution. These overlaps and frictions re- emphasise the necessity for terms such as “world cinema”, “mainstream” and “art cinema” to be closely examined in light of a global genre, not only in relation to their differences but also to their parallels, exchanges, and local and global contexts.

Chapter Conclusion

Viewing world cinema as “simply the cinema of the world” (Nagib 2006, 35), it becomes apparent that network films are engaged in finances and flows which by no means indicate a simplistic binary division between Hollywood and either vague or supposedly insular “elsewheres”. Network films have many textual commonalities that gesture towards cosmopolitan and global exchanges. At the same time, they are differentiated by their national backgrounds and localities, and these contexts highlight local relationships to global cinema trends. As a global genre these films collectively problematise the power relations involved in the terms “world cinema”, “national cinema”, and “art cinema”. At the same time they each illustrate differences and tensions between various geographies and industries. The prestige and prejudices surrounding the terms “world cinema” and “art cinema” and the practicalities of production, distribution and localities mean that these films are distributed unevenly. Some of these films do not travel far, while others saturate multiplexes. Nonetheless there is a blurring between the narrative attributes ascribed to different categories which draws attention to the need to view such labels critically. Such interrelationships and the global network genre both empirically and textually highlight the complexity of the term “world cinema”, illustrating the need to view it with attention not only to differences but also to commonalities. The global network genre helps to reframe notions of “world cinema” as it provokes a re-evaluation of terms that are often used in essentialist and limiting ways and encourages an analytic approach that is attendant to complex relationships between films.
Conclusion: Network Films, a Global Genre

Despite having emerged out of an array of countries and film industries, this thesis has shown that network films can be considered a global genre that has distinct qualities and helps to reframe categorical concepts of world cinema. These findings provide an answer to the uncertainty of whether network films are a genre, a question voiced by scholars such as Wendy Everett (2005, 159) and Charles Ramírez Berg (2006, 8). The comparative approach used throughout also contributes to a growing awareness of the need, as Paul Willemen argues (2005), for non-essentialising approaches to academic film analysis. In terms of theoretical implications, this study has: shown the continued practicality of Altman’s theory of genre; developed the concept of “network community” which may be applied not only to network films but to other texts and discourses of connectivity; refined the definition of network films that Bordwell and Azcona’s significant studies offer; shown that network films, unlike many other genres, represent a global genre that has arisen simultaneously around the world without one definitive originating country; demonstrated the wealth of critique that a comparative approach yields; contributed to the growing literature examining the use of essentialist notions of national, arthouse, and popular cinema within world cinema studies. In coming to the conclusion that network films may be described as a global genre, this thesis has thus contributed to the two very important Film Studies areas of genre and world cinema theory.

The definition of network films presented throughout has drawn upon and refined existing definitions of network films, gleaning from an international sample of case studies the conclusion that network films represent a global genre distinct from the broader trend of puzzle and ensemble films. Network films effectively imagine the communal implications of the paradigm of “network society” (Chapter One 16-7). Whereas some, including Azcona (2010, 19-21) and Hsu (2006, 134), describe network films as indistinct from ensemble films, I have drawn attention to the crucial theme of “network community” throughout the films. This term, constructed from Andreas Wittel’s idea of “network sociality” (2001) and Ferdinand Tönnies’ definition of “community” ([1887] 2001, 19), describes connections between strangers rather than between people who are already familiar with one another. This theme of “network
community” within the films provides an altogether unique conception of the potential for community amongst whole societies which otherwise appear fractured and alienated.

Indispensable to this examination has been Rick Altman’s seminal and insightful study of genre, in particular his theory of the interrelationship of semantics and syntax. My application of Altman’s theory provides a systematic analysis of a particular group of films which up until now have not been examined as a genre, although according to “common cultural consensus” (Tudor [1974] 2000, 96) they are considered a genre (Chapter One, 21-24). In the category of semantics, I found that the seven network films share core characteristics of common topics (Chapter Two), character types to a broad degree (Chapter Three), audiovisual motifs (Chapter Four), and spatial settings (Chapter Six). Syntactically, the films arranged these semantic aspects into comparable narrative themes (Chapter Two), visual styles (Chapter Four), character arcs and narratological patterns (Chapters Five and Six). Relating specifically to the societies out of which they arise, the most central aspect of network films is that they portray a semantic common topic of social cross sections of people who are often (we are led to believe) strangers to one another (Chapter Two). The films syntactically connect the characters in ways they do not realise, evoking a theme of network community distinctive to the genre (Chapters Four, Five, and Six). The common topics of contemporary political and cultural tensions semantically unite the films (Chapter Two). These concerns include politics relating to terrorism, gender and class inequalities, oppression, recent disasters, and multicultural relationships. Parallelisms, passing encounters, mutual acquaintances (Chapter Four), and likenesses in spatial (Chapter Six) and temporal framing (Chapter Five) are among the semantic and syntactic devices that link these characters. Spatially the films semantically focus on crossing borders and the limits and inequalities involved in doing so, and frequently compare different urban environments and how spaces shape characters’ connections (Chapter Six). Appealing to questions of whether communal values exist in societies, cosmopolitanism in various guises is a syntactic theme that runs through the genre, as characters in direct, indirect and/or unsuccessful ways help or affect one another (Chapter Four). Further indicating that they are a genre, processes of “genrification” are evident within popular discourse and in terms of the films’ production and marketing (Altman 1999, 62; Chapters One and Seven). As this study shows, this thirty-odd-year proliferation of network films can be called a global genre. Moreover, this global genre testifies to the contemporary social imaginary of a globally connected yet inequality-filled world.
While some see network films and their respective industries and narrative traditions as nationally specific and clearly differentiated (Locke 2007; Everett 2005; Hsu 2006; Bordwell 2008a), I have found that network films problematise such differentiations (Chapter Eight). As well as attending to the contrasts and inequalities between different texts and industries, I have put into practice Paul Willemen’s call “for a Comparative Film Studies” (2005). I have affirmed scholars’ arguments that the typical understanding of the terms “world cinema” and “art cinema” require critical re-evaluation in light of a global genre (Chapter Eight).

However, while the seven network films share semantic and syntactic aspects, it is clear that the values and traditions of their different film industries influence the ways in which these films project and are interpreted to project particular messages and styles. Looking at these films comparatively does not imply a utopian smoothing out of the industries’ differences, but instead has offered a method of recognising their differences and likenesses without lumping them into exclusively or essentially nationalistic categories. Their relationships with their respective industries and categorical labels reveal tensions, likenesses, inequalities and divisions between different industries as the films gain different degrees of international recognition. Textually they are varied, and in different ways illuminate contradictions and inadequacies involved in the categories “world cinema”, “art cinema”, and their respective “national” cinemas as they are commonly understood. While cultural contexts and cinema traditions influence the films, thanks to the complexities of narrative attributes, production contexts, and distribution practices, it is evident that there are few genuinely clear cut cases of “national” or “art” films as they are commonly understood. This comparative study has shown that a global genre closely relates films from around the world, therein expanding upon and challenging previous understandings of the term “world cinema”.

This thesis points to a number of future directions for both comparative analysis and genre studies. The sample studied here is by no means comprehensive and further study could illuminate many more tensions and parallels between popular and non-mainstream examples of network films. Comparative analyses between network films that are described as popular and arthouse produced within one country could further examine the overlaps and differences between these two concepts in more specific
localities. For example, comparison between the Hindi network film *Life in a Metro, Mumbai Meri Jaan*, Mani Ratnam’s Tamil ensemble film *Ayitha Ezhuthu*, his Hindi version of the same film, titled *Yuva*, and other examples of network and ensemble films made in India could examine in more depth the interrelations of India’s film industries and genres. More broadly, comparisons of network films from multiple countries deemed mainstream could analyse the means by which the term is defined and transgressed. Explorations of crossover examples of network and ensemble films could further detail the differences between them and possibly distinguish ensemble films as a genre. Whereas this thesis specifies network films as those having contemporary and simultaneously linked settings, examples of films such as *Cloud Atlas* (Tykwer, Wachowski and Wachowski 2012) and *The Hours* (Daldry 2002) where links are also created between different time periods yield rich possibilities for discussions of the network genre and puzzle narratives (for instance see Currie 2009; Parker 2010). In itself the complex and somewhat radical racial and gender relations in the recent adaptation of David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* deserve close study. These avenues for exploration indicate the huge body of network films around the world and the multiple debates that surround their position both as a genre and in the contexts of world cinema. As expected, this finding that the seven case studies belong to a global network genre provides a specific contribution to the examination of network films and the fields of genre studies and world cinema studies. These fields and the global network genre in turn offer many more opportunities for exploration and debate.


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Appendix: Character Maps

*Love for Share* Character Map

Key:

- **Red**: Married, Relationship
- **Light Blue**: Encounter
- **Pink**: Love
- **Purple**: Friends, Acquaintances
- **Dotted Blue**: In Proximity
- **Yellow**: Siblings, Related
- **Dotted Green**: Media Link
Babel Character Map

Key:
- Red: Married, Relationship
- Pink: Love
- Blue: Encounter
- Purple: Friends, Acquaintances
- Dotted Blue: In Proximity
- Yellow: Siblings, Related
- Dotted Yellow: Media Link
Mumbai My Life Character Map

Key:
- Married, Relationship
- Love
- Parents, Offspring
- Siblings, Related
- Encouter
- Friends, Acquaintances
- In Proximity
- Media Link
The Edge of Heaven Character Map

Key:
- Red: Married, Relationship
- Pink: Love
- Orange: Parents, Offspring
- Blue: Siblings, Related
- Black: In Proximity
- Purple: Friends, Acquaintances
- Blue: Encounter
- Dash: Media Link
Code Unknown Character Map

Key:
- Married, Relationship
- Love
- Parents, Offspring
- Siblings, Related
- Encounter
- Friends, Acquaintances
- In Proximity
- Media Link
Key:
- Married, Relationship
- Love
- Parents, Offspring
- Siblings, Related
- Encounter
- Friends, Acquaintances
- In Proximity
- Media Link
**Crash Character Map**

- **Grahame and Peter’s Mother**
  - Dorri
  - Farhad
  - Lara
  - Jean
  - Maria
  - Rick
  - Flanagan
  - Karen
  - Cameron
  - Christine

- **Ria**
  - Ken Ho
  - Shaniqua
  - Peter
  - Anthony
  - Tom
  - John

- **Kim Lee**

**Key:**
- **Married, Relationship**
- **Encounter**
- **Love**
- **Friends, Acquaintances**
- **Parents, Offspring**
- **In Proximity**
- **siblings, Related**
- **Media Link**