

TRANSNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS IN ALEJANDRO
GONZÁLEZ INÁRRITU'S *BABEL*

Réka M. Cristian

The global village is a place of
very arduous interfaces and very abrasive situations.
Marshall McLuhan

September 11, 2001 initiated a global “crisis of trust”¹ that seems to pervade most contemporary narratives. In *The Khazar Tournament - Against Contemporary Relativism*, first published in 1997, Paul Cornea observed that one can effectively refute contemporary sophism only by going beyond a belief system of “faith” (religious, etc.) in order to adopt trust as an alternative to faith, which “separates” and “opposes”² us. In turn, trust—willingly or unwillingly—“brings us together” and “unites”³ people by finding, through various practices, the realm of collective humanity. However, the contemporary crisis of trust, which materialized predominantly in the war on terrorism, was reconfigured by diverse forms of post-9/11 rhetoric throughout the globe, with special regard to visual narratives produced in or outside the United States of America. This crisis has since had its visible or less observable symptoms in all areas of life, producing intriguing avatars in times that can be regarded as the “desperado age.”⁴

Apart from this crisis but nevertheless still related to this particular moment, contemporary theories and methods in American Studies tend to embrace—among many other approaches—comparative studies, critical internationalism, globality, cosmopolitanism, and Postcolonial Studies. As Barbara Brinson Curiel, David Kazanjian, Katherine Kinney, Steven Mailloux, Jay Mechling, John Carlos Rowe, George Sánchez, Shelley Streeby, and

1 Andrei Cornea, *Turnirul Khazar: Impotriva relativismului contemporan [The Khazar Tournament. Against Contemporary Relativism]* (Iasi: Polirom, 2003,) 10.

2 Cornea, 10.

3 Cornea, 10.

4 Lidia Vianu, *The Desperado Age: British Literature at the Start of the New Millennium* (LiterNet Publishing House, 2006), retrieved from: <http://editura.liternet.ro/carte/179/Lidia-Vianu/The-Desperado-Age.html> (accessed 31 December, 2010).

Henry Yu argued in the “Introduction” to *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, this complex turn is concerned with “how one negotiates among local, national, and global perspectives, while remaining vigilantly self-critical about the epistemologically and historically deep ties that American Studies has had to U.S. imperialism.”⁵ A genuine internationalization of American Studies needs an increased involvement of transnational exchanges, which, in turn, favor the creation and use of “new paradigms of research”⁶ under the aegis of cosmopolitan discourses.

In the following, I propose to survey the ways trust works through the specter of various characters which challenge transnational negotiations in an inherently transnational medium: film. Alejandro González Iñárritu’s international co-production *Babel* (2006)⁷ is perhaps the best example of trust and its variant, the crisis of trust that appears in interpersonal relations in the contact zones of some specific parts of the world. As its title suggests, *Babel* alludes not only to the Biblical place where the confusion of languages took place (the Babylonian Babel, the Tower of Babel) but also to the very fact of language confusion and miscommunication (babel of voices) that it induced. The movie’s plot is shaped after this original confusion into a nonlinear narrative split into various scenes, eventually assembling a topography of miscommunications in a collage of identity mosaics that depict both the difficulty and the necessity of interaction⁸ and the ways in which people of diverse cultural backgrounds learn to relate to each other (‘s cultures) in critical contexts around the globe.

The incident in Morocco between locals and tourists triggers a series of events reaching the United States of America, Mexico and Japan, and becomes a perfect visual example that embodies a peculiar *butterfly-*

5 Barbara Brinson Curiel, David Kazanjian, Katherine Kinney, Steven Mailloux, Jay Mechling, John Carlos Rowe, George Sánchez, Shelly Streeby, Henry Yu, “Introduction” in *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, ed. John Carlos Rowe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 7.

6 Brinson Curiel et al., 7.

7 *Babel*, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, Screenplay: Guillermo Arriaga and Alejandro González Iñárritu, Cinematography: Rodrigo Prieto, Cast: Cate Blanchett, Brad Pitt, Adriana Barraza, Rinko Kikuchi, Gael García Bernal, Nathan Gamble, Elle Fanning, Kôji Yakusho, *et al*, Languages: English, Arabic, Berber, French, Spanish, Japanese, Distributor: Paramount Vantage, Runtime: 142 minutes, Year: 2006.

8 Terrence Rafferty, “Now Playing: Auteur vs. Auteur,” *The New York Times* 22 October 2006, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/22/movies/22raff.html?_r=4&oref=slogin (accessed 6 November, 2010).

effect process. The concept of the butterfly effect borrowed from the chaos theory, is a metaphor that describes the sensitive cause-effect dependence: any infinitesimal change can indirectly be related to a very remote object/being, for example, the flapping butterfly wings are able to ultimately cause significant changes (a hurricane, for example) on a large—even global—scale. *Babel* subscribes to this kind of butterfly-effect plot line transposed into a transnational medium which exhibits intricate international exchanges that activated from a local point spreads globally.

The butterfly-effect is a complex concept embodying the potential for static existence as well as the capacity for change. In his Metaphysics of Quality theory Robert Pirsig coined two similar notions: one as the old, complex “static pattern” and the other, the “Dynamic Quality,” “the source of all things, completely simple and always new.”⁹ “A home in suburban Short Hills, New Jersey, on an ordinary Wednesday afternoon is filled with static patterns,”¹⁰ writes the author of *Lila: An Inquiry Into Morals* and continues by enumerating the facts behind static situations and those leading to the Dynamic Quality. Pirsig observes that a “hurricane in Key Largo promises a Dynamic relief from static patterns,” while the “man who suffers a heart attack and is taken off the train at New Rochelle has had all his static patterns shattered.”¹¹ Because the man “can’t find them” he realizes that “in that moment only Dynamic Quality is available to him,” Pirsig continues, and emphasizes that the man “gazes at his own hand with a sense of wonder and delight”¹² because he has recognized the potential of change that the Dynamic Quality (i.e. the unpredicted, sudden change of his previous situation) holds in itself. While static patterns freeze the paradigms of structural systems (for example, the belief systems or trust), the Dynamic of Quality provides the “quality of freedom”¹³ that is endowed with an “increase in versatility”¹⁴ which produce, among other effects, miscommunication, crises of trust and even “desperado” scenes. González Iñárritu’s film is a visible metaphor of some obvious static patterns that appear in the four countries in which the film is set - Morocco, Japan,

9 Robert Pirsig, *Lila. An Inquiry Into Morals* (London: Corgi Books, [1991] 1992,) 57.

10 Pirsig, 58.

11 Pirsig, 58.

12 Pirsig, 58.

13 Pirsig, 59.

14 Pirsig, 72.

Mexico and the United States of America - and provides the picture for the Dynamic Quality materialized in transnational exchanges which occur after a specific butterfly-effect is set into motion.

This analysis of *Babel* will, in addition to the previous notions of trust, crisis, static pattern and Dynamic Quality, be also assisted by the concepts of Breyten Breytenbach's "Middle World" and John Ryder's interpretation of cosmopolitanism. The Middle World, according to Breytenbach, is not the Global Village but rather a symbolic space of encounter that is "equidistant from East and West, North and South;" appears equally "belonging and not belonging" but exists mostly off the Center, and is, above all and "by definition and vocation, peripheral,"¹⁵ in other words, marginal. This locus seems to be a subtle derivation from the geopolitical notions of the First, Second, and Third Worlds and might refer to some features of the Fourth World. This is a term with which Western thinking describes the status of peoples without states such as the Roma in Europe, Native Americans or the First Nations (sic!) in North America and aboriginals in Australia, Tibetans in China (Tibet), and so on.¹⁶ Above the political connotation which connects it to the Fourth World, the Middle World has a complementary dimension that is "aware of the moral implication of the narrative"¹⁷ its inhabitants produce. These narratives are unconventional histories of the marginalized people, of the excluded, of the refugees and the exiles. "Because of their indefinable character," Maria Todorova writes in *Imagining the Balkans*, "persons or phenomena in transitional states, like marginal ones, are considered dangerous, both being in danger themselves," but also "emanating danger to others."¹⁸ This context of danger is intimately connected with the concept of the crisis of trust.

The residents of the Middle World are *Middle-Worlders*—people with a specific nomadic thinking who "promote diversity, sometimes by default."¹⁹ Despite the fact that they live in an "emerging archipelago of self-enforced freedom and unintentional estrangement partaking in equal

15 Breyten Breytenbach, *Notes from the Middle World: Essays* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009), 136.

16 Réka M. Cristian, and Dragon Zoltán, *Encounters of the Filmic Kind: Guidebook to Film Theories* (Szeged: JatePress, 2008), 107.

17 Breytenbach, 152.

18 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17.

19 Breytenbach, 139.

parts of love and death.”²⁰ Middle-Worlders pride themselves on having “a vivid consciousness of being the Other.”²¹ Sometimes, geographical coordinates locate the symbolic land itself because “wherever its citizens are, there the Middle World is”²². This sense of a specific place—or for that matter, occasional environment—changes and turns out to be a “potentially dangerous framework”²³ in which the Middle-Worlders interact and evolve into transgressive figures subject to special narrative dynamics. In the context of the current globalized world, Middle-Worlders become post-national figures depicted by specific images that appear with increasing frequency in written and visual narratives worldwide.

The characters in *Babel* communicate and miscommunicate. Finding themselves in a complex process of transnational negotiation the characters manage to (re)define themselves - and their culture - through strategies by which they respond to specific events. This transnational transaction has traits of what Randolph Bourne coined in his celebrated essay on the transnational character of the United States of America written almost a century ago, as “cosmopolitan enterprise.”²⁴ The Middle-Worlder shares many common traits with the cosmopolitan person but while the cosmopolitan individual is a player of the center, the Middle-Worlder remains a figure of the periphery. The cosmopolitan exhibits a kind of “internationalism, though it is more than that,” John Ryder claims. While internationalism mostly values “international interaction and cooperation” cosmopolitanism, in the sense of communication and negotiations, implies much more than the other concept because it “asks of us that we interact with others in ways that allow us to identify, and where necessary to create common interests that enable us to work together in their pursuit.”²⁵ Cosmopolitanism can thus be considered, on the one hand, a “guiding principle” and a “crucial component” of all transnational exchanges and, on the other hand, a way to understand each other and “ourselves in the current political and

20 Breytenbach, 136.

21 Breytenbach, 149.

22 Breytenbach, 147.

23 Breytenbach, 147.

24 Randolph Bourne, “Trans-National America,” originally published in *Atlantic Monthly* 118 (July 1916), 86-97, retrieved from: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/rbannis1/AIH19th/Bourne.html> (accessed 31 January 2010).

25 John Ryder, “John Dewey, Democracy and a Cosmopolitan Ideal,” in *Americana E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary* 3.2 (2007), retrieved from: <http://americanajournal.hu/vol3no2/ryder> (accessed 10 November 2010).

international environment.”²⁶ A more concise definition of cosmopolitanism

includes the necessity for respect for other peoples, nations, histories and cultures; a desire to move beyond one’s own history and categories to attempt to understand others; a readiness to work collaboratively with others to advance shared interests and solve shared problems; a willingness at least and better an eagerness on the part of national governments, if we are to think about policy oriented cosmopolitanism, to suspend to some degree national interest as traditionally understood in favor of the promotion of common interests among nations, their governments, and their people.²⁷

The Middle-Worlder is the term for the individual who constructs a specific identity between or among cultures in a specifically tense and sometimes adverse political climate; the cosmopolitan attitude shows the ideal conditions of relationships individuals make on the cross-cultural arena, while the concept of the transnational exchange encompasses the static pattern together with the Dynamic Quality set composed of the individual with its intricate net of geopolitical relationships.

Babel, the fractured narrative with rounded characters, shows similar traits to Richard Curtis’s movie *Love Actually*²⁸ but does more than presenting a rhizomatic narrative of transnationally interlocked parallel lives that do ultimately and intimately connect under the aegis of love (and trust); in terms of crisis critique *Babel* connotes more than for example, Emir Kusturica’s *Underground*,²⁹ which knits together war traumas, trust dilemmas and

26 Ryder, op. cit.

27 Ryder, op. cit.

28 *Love Actually*, Written and directed by Richard Curtis, Music: Craig Armstrong, Cinematography: Michael Coulter, Cast: Hugu Grant, Bill Nighy, Keira Knightley, Alan Rickman, Colin Firth, Rowan Atkinson, Emma Thompson, Martine McCutcheon, Laura Linney, Billy Bob Thornton, Liam Neeson, Martin Freeman, et al, Distributor: Universal Pictures, Runtime: 136 minutes, Language: English, Year: 2003.

29 *Underground (Once Upon a Time There was a Country)*, directed by Emir Kusturica, Writing credits: Emir Kusturica and Dušan Kovačević, Music: Goran Bregović, Cinematography: Vilko Filčić, Cast: Miki Manjlović, Mirjana Joković, Lazar Ristovski, Ernst Stötzner, Dragan Nikolić, Emir Kusturica, Srđjan Todorović, Slavko Štimac, Distributed by: New Yorker Video, Runtime: 167 minutes, Language: Serbian, English, German, Year: 1995.

unregulated transnational relationships from within the Balkans through Europe; González Iñárritu's movie is a hyperlink film³⁰ that uproots crises of trust from specific regions or countries and places them in a set of synchronic structures with incalculable global potential. The movie is a flawless calibration of a five-day-four-story network set in different countries that are both external and internal sites of negotiations as what trust and the crisis of trust is concerned and assembled in "several apparently distinct stories that gradually reveal themselves as a single story."³¹

The narrative launchpad of González Iñárritu's story is a desert place in Morocco. Two shepherd boys, Yussef and Ahmed (Boubker Ait El Caid and Said Tarchini) receive a rifle from their father, Abdullah (Mustapha Rachidi), who bought the gun from his neighbor Hassan (Abdelkader Bara), in order to kill the jackals that regularly decimate his goat herd. Yussef and Ahmed are living their everyday battles with life in a remote Third World village, and—as prototypes of almost-nomad Middle-Worlders—they venture into deeds where their truths no longer fit, where any previous certainties dissipate and where they, eventually, get lost.³² The boys start competing with each other, play with the newly bought rifle and shoot at different static and moving targets around them. Unfortunately, unlike the surrounding desert, the nearby road in the valley is not devoid of traffic: a bus full of tourists arrives when Yussef fires the gun. A random bullet hits a young American passenger—Susan Jones (Cate Blanchett). This incident is the film's crucial event triggering the next episodes; in Pirsig's term, it is the visual point presenting the Dynamic Quality that sets in motion local adventures and then global incidents. Not fully aware of what has happened and also very scared of the consequences of their deeds, Yussef and Ahmed quickly run away and hide the rifle while the bus speeds up toward the nearest village, where Susan is immediately helped by a caring old medicine woman and then a veterinarian doctor, whose applies first aid stabilizes her condition.

Meanwhile, on the bus, an atmosphere of distrust toward local people (induced by 9/11 and its aftermath) pervades as tourists become

30 Roger Ebert, "Babel" (2006), *Chicago Sun Times*, 22 September 2007, retrieved from: <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070922/REVIEWS08/70922001/1023> (accessed 13 January 2010).

31 Terrence Rafferty, "Now Playing: Auteur vs. Auteur," *The New York Times* 22 October 2006, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/22/movies/22raff.html?_r=4&oref=slogin (accessed 6 November 2010).

32 Breitenbach, 135.

increasingly agitated due to their fall into an “established script made of prejudice and misunderstanding.”³³ This behavior is sparked by the lingering ghost of terrorism, whereas in reality it was an accidental bullet that created the crisis of distrust. In the hands of Yusef, the rifle’s static value has turned into a flow of Dynamic Quality. Alienated from the commodities of their assumed safe culture and frightened by the possibility of another (presumed terrorist) attack, the rest of the tourists decide to take the bus and leave the village as soon as they can, selfishly abandoning their fellow travelers: the seriously injured Susan and her husband Richard Jones (Brad Pitt), who tries to call the American Embassy for further help. The tourists of *Babel* are in Thorstein B. Veblen’s formulation, only reminders of contemporary “conspicuous consumers”³⁴ and mostly media conditioned paranoids without genuine cosmopolitan features. Only Anwar (Mohamed Akhzam), the Moroccan tour guide, remains with the couple until their nightmare is solved. His attitude is a model of behavior. As a local Middle-Worlder, he has genuine traits of cosmopolitanism that help him to communicate and manage a problematic (internationally turned local) situation. He helps rebuild a sense of trust which was destroyed first by the gunshot and then by the fellow tourists who abandoned Susan and Richard. Despite the international turmoil upon implied political issues behind the accident that delay her transportation, Susan ultimately arrives at a hospital and recovers.

The accident, however, becomes news; the world acknowledges this event with a prompt presentation through the international mass media, which biased by the imminent stereotypes of the event (Morocco, local shooting, tourist bus, American woman), broadcasts it as an alleged terrorist attack. Moreover, the focus of the film turns toward on a Japanese newscaster, whose report shifts the focus of the narrative from Morocco to Japan, a seemingly random shift that nevertheless turns out to be significant in the course of further global investigations. According to this report,

Susan Jones, who was wounded in a terrorist attack in
Morocco, was discharged from a Casablanca hospital

33 Roger Ebert, “Babel” (2006), *Chicago Sun Times* 22 September 2007, retrieved from: <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070922/REVIEWS08/70922001/1023> (accessed: 13 January 13 2010).

34 Thorstein Bunde Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* [1899], e-book produced by David Reed and David Widger, Project Gutenberg, 2008, Chapter IV “Conspicuous Consumption,” retrieved from: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/833/833-h/833-h.htm> (accessed 28 December 2010).

this morning, local time. The American people finally have a happy ending, after five days of frantic phone calls and hand wringing.³⁵

The profile of the U.S. appears here both on the level of the individual and on the level of state (“American people,” media, diplomacy) with special focus on the individual, who can and does genuinely transgress borders of many kinds and becomes the cosmopolitan agent of (more trustful) communication bridging over the sometimes too rigid burdens of the political reality. After the news is on the air, the government of the United States of America asks Moroccan officials to find the culprits. Following a short search on the basis of the sophisticated bullets and rifle they are quickly led to Hassan, who tells authorities that he sold the rifle to Abdullah. In the meantime, Abdullah’s sons confess their deed and, in fear of retaliation, they all try to run away but it is too late. The police start shooting at them. Finally, Ahmed is injured and Yussef surrenders, confessing the entire story that remains labeled as previously reported news. However, the origin of the rifle still remains obscure.

The stop-start narrative amasses many flashbacks, including the background story of the American couple. Susan Jones is traveling with her husband in Morocco on an attempt to heal the loss of their child due to sudden infant death syndrome. Susan and Richard are examples of what Ryder calls “comfort” cosmopolitanists³⁶ due to their behavior and simply because that they can afford it, similar to Amelia Warren’s (Catherine Zeta-Jones) globetrotter-stewardess character in Steven Spielberg’s *The Terminal*³⁷. They trust native people not only in moments of emergency but do interact and cooperate closely with Middle-Worlders despite any crisis of trust. The Jones have two children, Debbie (Elle Fanning) and Mike (Nathan Gamble), attended in their Californian home by a Mexican nanny, Amelia (Adriana Barazza), who is impatiently waiting to attend her son’s wedding in Mexico. Because of Susan’s accident, Amelia has to remain in San Diego. The telephone call she receives from Richard requesting her to stay longer with children produces the Dynamic Quality of the next

35 Ebert, op. cit.

36 Ryder, op. cit.

37 *The Terminal*, Directed by: Steven Spielberg, Writers and Screenplay: Andrew Niccol, Sacha Grevasi, Jeff Nathanson, Music: John Williams, Cinematography: Janusz Kamiński, Cast: Tom Hanks, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Stanley Tucci, Zoë Saldana, Kumar Pallana, Berry Shabaka Henley, Diego Luna, *et al*, Distributor: Dreamworks. Runtime: 128 minutes, Year: 2004.

narrative segment of the film. Unable to miss this important family event, she decides to take the children with her and elicits the help of her problematic nephew, Santiago (Gael García Bernal) to drive them across the border to the Mexican fiesta.

Miraculously, they cross the border without incident, enjoy the fiesta but then decide to return to the United States that night. Their Middle-Worlder status lasts only temporary; Mike is fearful of the trip. He feels, like Juan Rulfo's narrator of "Macario," that he is "passing through purgatory,"³⁸ a feeling common to many illegal border-zone trespassers. Young Mike suffers a personal crisis of trust because he has been told that "Mexico is dangerous," to which Santiago ironically replies in Spanish that "yes, it's full of Mexicans."³⁹ Nevertheless, this objectification of danger leads to still another crisis of trust but not on the part of the children or the accompanying 'dangerous' Mexicans but rather on the border crossing back to the United States. Here, an officer becomes suspicious of Santiago's behavior and quickly realizes that children are traveling without a letter of consent from the parents. Confused and scared as Yussef and Ahmed were Amelia decides on the spur of the moment to perform an illegal act - to cross the border in the Tijuana desert with the Jones children. After extensive wandering in the desert-like Middle-World nomads navigating the badlands—Amelia and her charges get lost in this symbolic no man's land. The next day, afraid of possible fatal consequences, Amelia leaves the children in a place she thinks they are safe and where she can easily find her way back. She leaves in search of help; however, the border patrol finds and arrests her. The Jones children arrive home safely but Amelia is deported to Mexico after 16 years of working illegally in the United States despite the fact that Richard and Susan press no charges against her.

The narrative montage of the film moves on to a Japanese section that holds the key of the entire narrative. In Japan local detectives investigate the source of the rifle used in the Moroccan 'attack' in and try to find transnational links with the event in North Africa. Chieko Wataya (Rinko Kikuchi), a deaf-mute teenage girl living in a modern Tokyo apartment with her father, Yasujiro Wataya (Kôji Yakusho), had a traumatic experience and remains emotionally unstable because she is unable to overcome the suicide of her mother. To attract attention, she is sexually provoking her dentist and young boys at a dancing club. Then she exposes herself naked to the detective who inquires about a specific gun. Still haunted by the

38 Juan Rulfo, "Macario." In *The Burning Plain and Other Stories*. Trans. George D. Schade. (Austin: U of Texas P, 2008), 8.

39 *Babel* (dir. Alejandro G. Iñárritu).

tragic end of her mother who had shot herself and perhaps to protect her father from any inconvenient situation, Chieko informs the detective that her mother jumped out of the window. This narrative detour encapsulates a Dynamic Quality, which is part of the strategy of her survival in a linguistic geography pertaining to the margins. Similar to Amelia's illegal border crossing (to get children safely back) and to Yussef hiding the gun after the accident, she misleads the police about the relationship between the weapon they search for and her family members. Feeling an outcast and being 'Othered' by her inability to communicate with both her father about their loss as well as with the detective whom she likes, Chieko starts to resemble a linguistic nomad, a Middle-Worlder, caught between her wish to communicate and her inability to do so.

Despite her confining use of sign language, Chieko is one of *Babel's* most articulate characters. She is "deaf," but "not blind." She shows a desperate wish "to utter that word or sentence" but is prevented "because of the language barrier," gender expectations, specific "cultural assumptions" and mostly by "the inability of others to comprehend" what she says or might be "actually saying."⁴⁰ Chieko sees and understands the world around her but the world seems to ignore her or, as in the case of her father, to miscommunicate with her emotional tension. She is a key character and the only 'thread' that can lead the police to the story of the rifle. The detective finally meets her father, Yasujiro who promptly clarifies the situation. The gun that produced such turmoil had once belonged to him but after a memorable hunting trip to Morocco he gave the rifle as a gift to his local guide, Hassan. The origin of the rifle is finally solved in Japan after many transnational twists and turns; the epic of anxiety comes to a satisfactory denouement. The butterfly-effect has reached its last location.

Babel tackles issues that cut across three continents, four countries, five languages (English, Arabic, Spanish, Japanese, and Japanese sign language), many nations (media) and even more people and focuses on the vulnerability of both foreigners as tourists and natives as locals in a global climate of susceptibility. The transnational negotiations of the film take place in specific contact zones between and among certain people; these are the limits of language and culture visualized in the movie as the Moroccan desert and the windows of the tourist bus, the Tijuana border crossing and the telephone interface, the family balcony/apartment in Tokyo and Chieko's secret notes, the screen on which media relates the events and many more. These unrelated loci are static premises that become activated

40 Ebert, op. cit.

by the emergence of a small incident (a gunshot, a phone call, etc.) which causes the flow of the Dynamic Quality to spread in the region and then on a wider level, reaching even globally remote areas. In the transnational encounters that are caused by this dynamic phenomenon, the characters of *Babel* face a series of attitudes which condition their negotiations: carelessness, paranoia, biases, stupidity, barriers of language, vulnerability and immigration issues, all placed amidst a crisis of trust on a global level. In these arduous and quite abrasive conditions “when any kind of contact is achieved, against the long odds of our essential separateness, it looks like a miracle.”⁴¹ González Inárritu’s *Babel* maps some of these liaison miracles. It is a sensible commentary, a visual translation of the articulations among global, regional, national, and local forces, and also a cultural product reflecting intricate processes of negotiations between nations, groups of people, and individuals. In short, this movie reflects a post-nationalist tendency towards intradiegetic and extradiegetic issues alike which can be best described in terms of transnational discourse.

Cosmopolitan or Middle-Worlder, in the transnational negotiations this film depicts (and most probably in all such negotiations around the world) it is not the group, the organization, the denomination, company, party or the nation but the individual who can primarily overcome and is actually mastering the crises of trust on the global level throughout the complex web of inter-personal encounters across cultures that seem to ultimately count.

41 Rafferty, op. cit.