

---

# The Global Social Problem Film

Andrew deWaard

As Justin Rosenberg famously stated: “‘Globalization’ was the *Zeitgeist* of the 1990s” (2). While debates continue to rage surrounding the concept of globalization and globalization theory, it is undeniable that we now live in a much more “globalized” world than we did fifty, twenty, even ten years ago. In typical Hollywood style, it took some time for mainstream cinema to embody characteristics of this sweeping socio-politico-economic change, but its effects have now most certainly arrived. Hollywood has, of course, always been a global institution. But like globalization itself, the transformation is not so much a matter of innovation, but degree. The changes taking place – both globally and cinematically – are not necessarily new, but what is new is the rapid rate at which they are occurring. From worldwide release patterns and digital technology<sup>1</sup> to piracy and the New International Division of Cultural Labour,<sup>2</sup> the changes are happening exceptionally quick. One such development – simultaneously an embodiment as well as an artistic response to transnational flows – is the emerging cycle of global social problem films.

My case studies in elucidating the global social problem film (the GSP)<sup>3</sup> will be Steven Soderbergh’s *Traffic* (2000), with its three intersecting plot lines exploring the illegal Mexican-American drug trade from the perspective of user, enforcer, politician and trafficker, and Stephen Gaghan’s *Syriana* (2005), a geopolitical thriller that explores the political, military, economic, legal and social aspects of the global oil industry. Another recent example of the GSP is *Fast Food Nation* (Linklater, 2006), the fictional interpretation of Eric Schlosser’s expose of the same name detailing the economic, environmental and social consequences of the fast food industry, weaving stories from across the United States and Mexico. *Babel* (Iñárritu, 2006) is another: this

multi-language, globe-spanning mediation on communication follows a chain of events linking an American tourist couple, a Japanese father and daughter, two Moroccan boys, and a Mexican nanny’s cross-border trip with two American children. *Blood Diamond* (Zwick, 2006) tackles conflict diamonds in war zones, *The Constant Gardener* (Meirelles, 2005) takes on the global pharmaceutical industry, *Munich* (Spielberg, 2005) explicates international terrorism, and *Lord of War* (Niccol, 2005) satirizes global arms distribution. The GSP is a result of postmodern genre hybridity, an integral characteristic of New Hollywood. As seminal genre theorist Steve Neale notes, “New Hollywood can be distinguished from the old by the hybridity of its genres and films... this hybridity is governed by the multi-media synergies characteristic of the New Hollywood, by the mixing and recycling of new and old and low art and high art media products in the modern (or post-modern) world” (248). The GSP’s hybridity is comprised of three main ingredients: the original social problem film of early Hollywood cinema, the distinct influence of documentary/docudrama, and the multilinear, web-of-life (or as will later be theorized by way of Deleuze: rhizomatic) plotline. There is usually a dash of thriller, a pinch of sardonic wit, and the whole bastardized recipe occurs in a global melting pot.

## *Socially Well-Adjusted*

In what might well be considered the textbook for the social problem film, *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties* provides an extremely thorough and systematic analysis of the social problem film. Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy explicitly define the genre according to its didacticism:

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert E. Davis, “The Instantaneous Worldwide Release: Coming Soon to Everyone, Everywhere,” in *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 73-80.

<sup>2</sup> Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria, and Richard Maxwell, *Global Hollywood 2* (London: British Film Institute, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> In a nod to Miller et al.’s convenient dropping of a letter in their acronym, NICL, I’ve taken the liberty of dropping a letter in mine, GSP, to parallel such other globe-impacting acronyms as GNP and GDP.

“the central dramatic conflict revolves around the interaction of the individual with social institutions (such as government, business, political movements, etc.)... it deals with social themes very much on the surface of the dramatic action” (viii). Similarly, another look at the social problem film finds it “distinguished by the way its subject was usually given as much weight as its stars or story: the films used individual human dramas to present a morality tale with wider social repercussions” (Brooke). Notable examples of the original social problem film include *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain*

As Slavoj Žižek remarked, “On September 11, the USA was given the opportunity to realize what kind of a world it was part of” (47). While Žižek astutely identifies America’s largely ideologically-reaffirming response, we might also witness a certain global social consciousness arising out of the ashes of Ground Zero. Though certainly not limited to the events of 9/11, this emerging global consciousness – a concern for the global ramifications of our actions and decisions – parallels the one that gave birth to the original social problem film.

---

**“There is usually a dash of thriller, a pinch of sardonic wit, and the whole bastardized recipe occurs in a global melting pot.”**

---

*Gang* (LeRoy, 1932), Frank Capra’s *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), and *Best Years of Our Lives* (Wyler, 1946).

Roffman and Purdy place the social problem film’s rise and peak during the 30s and 40s, though Kay Sloan locates its origins during the silent era with what he terms *The Loud Silents*. The social problem film can be located periodically during the tumultuous times of the 60s and 70s, with Watergate, the civil rights movement, and the Vietnam War providing ample social strife. The 80s are typically remembered for the blockbuster’s rise to preeminence, but independent auteurs kept the spirit of the social problem film alive with films such as John Sayles’ *Matewan* (1987) and Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* (1989). But the recent wave of social problem-focused Hollywood films suggests that the GSP constitutes a new and emboldened cycle in the social problem genre. If its forefather was concerned with an individual in conflict with a social institution, the GSP exponentially multiplies both dimensions. Rather than focusing on a single individual, we get a multitude of interconnected individuals; instead of a solitary institution, we get the network of social institutions. Both *Traffic* and *Syriana* follow a series of individuals in their interactions with the intertwined systems of law, military, economics, and government. Specifically how this is accomplished will be considered below, but first we can trace the GSP’s origins in the original social problem film.

Roffman and Purdy locate two key reasons for the emergence of the social problem film, reasons we will witness in the emergence of the GSP as well. The first was the strong sense of social consciousness that grew out of the Depression and the subsequent rise of fascism. Along with the novels of John Steinbeck and the songs of Woody Guthrie, audiences were hungry for social and political commentary. Seventy years later, the GSP is in a similar situation, albeit a vastly different social and political climate. Though *Traffic* predates it, the attacks on the World Trade Center of 9/11 mark a certain entrance – whether desired or not – onto the global stage for America.

The second major factor in the development of the original social problem was the “golden era” of the Hollywood studio system. Guided by the Production Code, a basic set of conventions and a consistent ideological framework was established which propelled Hollywood to central prominence in the popular culture landscape. The social problem film was able to capitalize on Hollywood’s studio formula and present social problems that complied with the Code’s ideological viewpoint. From the standpoint of production, the GSP is in a similar situation through which it can exploit the Hollywood system. Rather than a studio formula, the GSP is a product of the middle-tier that developed in the 1990s between the “independents” and the “majors”: the “major independent.” Following in the footsteps of Disney’s success with Miramax, every major studio acquired a stable of subsidiaries (sometimes referred to as “stindies” or “mini-majors”) in order to profit from notoriety gained at the Academy Awards and prestigious film festivals.<sup>4</sup> Negotiating the fine line between art and commerce, the major independents provide the opportunity for big-budget, celebrity-starring, heavily-marketed films that can still retain their artistic merit and message to thrive within a landscape dominated by blockbuster filmmaking. Examples of this new mode of production, *Traffic* was developed with Universal’s USA Films (now Focus Features) and *Syriana* was developed by Soderbergh’s own production company Section Eight Ltd. (a partnership with George Clooney) and Participant Productions (Jeff Skoll’s production company that focuses on films which inspire social change), with financing from Warner Brothers. The product of an emerging global consciousness as well as fortuitous industry developments, the GSP is in a unique position with which to raise awareness of pertinent global problems.

### ***Keeping it Real***

**D**ocumentary filmmaking – and its offshoot, docudrama – is the second key influence for the global social problem film. As the primary focus of

the GSP is shedding light on a real-world problem, the effort to achieve a sense of realism is vital. Stylistically, the use of ostentatious cinematography is rare, but if used, serves a utilitarian function. *Traffic*, for example, uses distinctive colour palettes to clearly distinguish its three plotlines: the East Coast scenes are shot in bright daylight to produce icy blue, monochromatic tones; the Mexican scenes are overexposed and use ‘tobacco’ filters for grainy, bleached-out sepia tones; and the San Diego scenes use the risky technique of ‘flashing’ the negative for a halo effect to complement the vibrant hues. Documentary-invoking handheld camerawork often compliments this realist, utilitarian cinematography.

The use of graphic matches with sound bridges is another stylistic convention of the GSP, its editing embodying its objective to find and explore global connections. In the conclusion of *Syriana*, for instance, a shot of the videotaped burial requests of a young Pakistani terrorist, Wasim (Mazhar Munir), slowly fades into a graphically-matched shot of the energy analyst’s (Matt Damon) sole surviving son, while Wasim’s chilling dialogue bridges the edit: “From the dust a new person will be created.” The toll this oil addiction will have on future generations across the globe is rendered explicit by this stylistic convention.

Primarily, realism in the GSP is produced through a reliance on non-fiction resources in the scriptwriting process. Although based on the 1989 British television miniseries *Traffik* (Reid, 1989), Stephen Gaghan made significant changes to his adaptation after a year’s worth of obsessive research, interviews with key political figures in Washington, and investigative trips to San Diego and Tijuana. Most notably, the drug cartels were shifted from Columbia to Mexico to correspond with the real-life relocation of drug production that occurred in the preceding decade. Another element of realism is Gaghan’s own drug addiction, which, according to Sharon Waxman’s account, started



in high school (the basis for Caroline, the preschool drug abuser) and continued throughout pre-production of the film.

*Syriana* has a similar non-fiction background, including its confusing title. The term ‘Syriana’ is a metaphor for foreign intervention in the Middle East, used by Washington think-tanks to describe a hypothetical reshaping of the region to ensure continued access to oil. The screenplay is loosely adapted<sup>5</sup> from former CIA case officer

Robert Baer’s memoirs, *See No Evil: The True Story of a Ground Soldier in the CIA’s War Against Terrorism*. Robert Baer became the basis for George Clooney’s character, Bob Barnes, who similarly undertakes various clandestine Middle Eastern operations, including a failed assassination plot.<sup>6</sup> Because of this fictionalizing of non-fictional memoirs, the film carries this unique statement in the credits: “While inspired by a non-fiction work, this motion picture

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see Allen J. Scott, “Hollywood and the world: the geography of motion-picture distribution and marketing,” in *Review of International Political Economy* 11:1 (February 2004), pp. 33-61. Alisa Perren, “sex, lies and marketing: Miramax and the Development of the Quality Indie Blockbuster,” in *Film Quarterly* 55:2 (2001), pp. 30-39. Justin Wyatt, “The Formation of the ‘major independent’: Miramax, New Line, and the New Hollywood,” in *Contemporary American Cinema*. ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 74-90.



even the slightest criticism towards American governmental policy, there were accusations of those “typical Hollywood liberals” and their “anti-American” values. An op-ed in the *Washington Post* claimed that “Osama bin Laden could not have scripted this film with more conviction” (Krauthammer). I will leave the validity of that statement to the reader’s discretion.

Seth Feldman’s analysis of the genre, “Footnote to Fact: The Docudrama,” focuses on the function of such films. His analysis of the three most popular incarnations of the docudrama – *Roots* (Chomsky *et al*, 1977), *Holocaust* (Chomsky, 1978), and *The Day After* (Meyer, 1984) – finds them “firmly grounded in events that had already achieved a central place in the public imagination. What all three programs then spoke to were the personal, psychological reasons for that centrality” (349). The same could be said for *Traffic*’s engagement with the War on Drugs and *Syriana*’s interconnection of the War on Terror with Big Oil: prevalent issues in the forefront of the social imaginary seen through the eyes of a range of (mostly) sympathetic characters. However, it must be noted that unlike Feldman’s examples, *Traffic* and *Syriana* are dealing with contemporary, ongoing issues that demand attention and action; they are not simply ruminating on past events.

Furthermore, Feldman’s reading of the conservative, comforting nature of the docudrama is not applicable to the GSP. *Roots*, *Holocaust*, and *The Day After* attempted, according to Feldman, to provide “explanations of an incomprehensible world to the disenfranchised,” but failed to offer “a deeper understanding of historical forces; rather it is the durability of [the] familial order” (349) that is celebrated. Conversely, the GSP’s greatest strength is its illumination of socio-politico-economic forces through narrative means. And while the GSP is also concerned with the familial order (*Syriana* in particular focuses on

and all of the characters and events portrayed in it (except for incidental archival footage), are fictional.” The fine line between ‘real’ and ‘reel’ is certainly blurred, and a rare breed of docudrama is formed.

Docudrama, which quite obviously combines elements of documentary and drama, typically involves recreations or dramatizations of documented events, and may involve real footage of the events themselves. Its aim

is to concentrate on the facts and avoid editorializing or opinionated bias; in practice, of course, this rarely occurs. The inherent problem of bias in docudrama became a newsworthy event this past year with ABC’s “controversial”<sup>7</sup> airing of *The Path to 9/11* (Cunningham, 2006). *Syriana*, also a dramatization of real events, was subject to criticism for its political bias as well. As is the case with any cultural text that ventures

<sup>5</sup> To the dismay of Gaghan, it was deemed an Original Screenplay by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>6</sup> Critics accused the film for changing the assassination plot’s target from Saddam Hussein in the book to a benevolent, liberal prince in the film. My response would be: Mohammed Mossadegh.

<sup>7</sup> “Controversial” in this case being newspeak for “blatant right-wing propaganda,” see Max Blumenthal, “ABC 9/11 Docudrama’s Right-Wing Roots,” in *The Nation*. 11 September 2006. <[http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060925/path\\_to\\_911](http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060925/path_to_911)>.

fathers and sons), here the solidarity of the family is seen to be in decay in the face of such dire global problems. The GSP is thus a unique variant of the docudrama, but without its conservative trappings.

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention the recent resurgence

Tanzanians; and *Why We Fight* (Jarecki, 2005), an exploration of the American military-industrial complex's quest for global domination. These bold documentaries share a similar sensibility and global consciousness with the GSP: they are informative indictments for change.

of intolerance throughout the ages, rather than its global connectivity. Multiple storylines focused on a single locale are also not uncommon in the history of Hollywood, *Grand Hotel* (Goulding 1932) and *Dinner at Eight* (Cukor 1933) being the earliest incarnations. The disaster film also

---

**“The same could be said for *Traffic*'s engagement with the War on Drugs and *Syriana*'s interconnection of the War on Terror with Big Oil: prevalent issues in the forefront of the social imaginary seen through the eyes of a range of (mostly) sympathetic characters.”**

---

in documentary filmmaking that is largely concerned with global connections and consequences as well. This strain of global social problem documentaries might be seen as a parallel cycle to the GSP, sharing similar tactics and worldviews. The all-time highest grossing documentary film is *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Moore, 2004), which lampoons the Bush administration and its corporate cronyism for exploiting the 9/11 attacks towards an aggressive foreign policy with dire global consequences. *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim, 2006), third highest grossing, is a passionate and informative plea for clarity and action against worldwide climate change. Other popular examples include *The Fog of War*, (Morris 2003), outlining the global threat of the American military as seen through the eyes of Robert S. McNamara, architect of the Vietnam War; *The Corporation* (Achbar, 2003), a psychological examination of the corporate organizational model that has dominated economic, political and social forces around the world; *Darwin's Nightmare* (Sauper, 2004), which explores the global network created around the Lake Victoria perch, from European supermarkets to Russian arms dealers to exploited

#### *Rhizomatuz!*

The final – and most revolutionary – aspect of the GSP is its innovation on the web-of-life plotline. Instead of the traditional two primary lines of action, the 1990s saw a surge of films weaving together a variety of plotlines involving a multitude of characters. Again, this is not a matter of precedence, but degree. The last fifteen years produced a tremendous increase in multilinear filmmaking; some prominent examples include *Slacker* (Linklater, 1991), *Reservoir Dogs* (Tarantino, 1992), *Short Cuts* (Altman, 1993), *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1996), *Magnolia* (Anderson, 1999), *Snatch* (Ritchie, 2000), *Amores Perros* (Iñárritu, 2002), and *Crash* (Haggis, 2004). As we will see, the GSP utilizes this multilinear form for political ends.

David Dresser dates the multilinear narrative back as far as *Intolerance* (1916), D.W. Griffith's silent-era epic spanning 2,500 years, paralleling four different ages in world history. For our purposes, we might consider *Intolerance* as the birth of the GSP nearly a century before its popularization, though it concentrates on the enduring problem

relies on multiple characters united in adversity; horror films, to a lesser degree, rely on a similar structure.

The pioneer of the web-of-life plotline is Robert Altman, and as such, he had a tremendous influence on the GSP. *Nashville* (1975) is a landmark film, not just for the GSP, but for cinema as a whole. With *Nashville*, Altman weaves a cinematic web the likes of which had never been seen before in mainstream film: densely interconnected storylines, a massive ensemble cast, and a satirical mixing of presidential politics with the business of country/gospel music. *Short Cuts*, “an L.A. jazz rhapsody” (Wilmington) is inspired by nine short stories by Raymond Carver and follows 22 principal characters.<sup>8</sup> Altman's signature style – overlapping dialogue and a wandering, zooming camera to capture his web of improvising characters – complements this formal experimentation, as it did in *Nashville*.

Utilizing the web-of-life plotline creates an expectation within the viewer for unforeseen relations and causal connections among the film's disparate characters. With the GSP, the web-of-life is woven on a much larger scale: the global web-of-life. Thus, the connections made are

---

<sup>8</sup> The postmodern mark of pop culture significance, *Short Cuts* was parodied, along with *Pulp Fiction*, in an episode of *The Simpsons* entitled “[3F18] 22 Short Films About Springfield.”

far more startling and unexpected. In *Traffic*, a teenaged drug abuser (Erika Christensen) in a Cincinnati prep school affects her father's ability as the newly appointed drug czar (Michael Douglas) to combat a corrupt Mexican General (Tomas Milian) who has just enlisted the help of a double-crossing cop (Benicio

defines philosophy as the creation of concepts that define a particular range of thinking with which to grapple with reality. One such valuable conception is Deleuze and Guattari's own rhizome, formulated in *A Thousand Plateaus*, which is a concept based on multiplicity, aiming to move away from the traditional

by a post-Fordist disposable workforce and led astray by radical Islam, simultaneously provides an entry and an exit from this rhizome.

A rhizome "has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows" (21). Perhaps this explains the common reception of *Syriana's*

---

**“The film has thus utilized the structure of the rhizome in its plot structure to illuminate the rhizomatic quality of its subject matter. The viewer is supposed to get lost in the film’s complex story and be even more bewildered by its fruition.”**

---

Del Toro) in his effort to continue supplying cocaine to a jailed San-Diego based drug kingpin (Alec Roberts) whose wife (Catherine Zeta-Jones) continues the family business while under the surveillance of a rogue African-American DEA agent (Don Cheadle) who has just lost his Puerto-Rican partner (Luis Guzmán) to a Mexican hitman (Clifton Collins Jr.). This is, of course, just one line of connection between the central characters, many more could be made. It is here, in the limitless possibility of interconnection, that the GSP presents its revolutionary act. In his essay "Global Noir: Genre Film in the Age of Transnationalism," David Dresser concludes with this provocation:

Multiple storylines, the simultaneity of events forever skewing chronology and linearity, and chance encounters are, after all, not only the very core of global noir, but the very stuff of the hypertext that is digital and cyber technologies. Is global noir, then, the future of cinema, and is the future here? (534)

Short answer: Yes with a but; long answer: Deleuze with an if. But first, some background.

With their two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1972's *Anti-Oedipus* and 1980's *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari set out to enact, among other things, a transformation of "the image of thought." Rather than the grand pursuit of truth or reason, Deleuze

binary structure of Western thought. A figure borrowed from biology, the rhizome is a model in strict opposition to the conventional figure of the tree which operates on the principles of foundation and origin. The rhizome, on the contrary, is proliferating and serial; it operates on the principles of connection and heterogeneity. There can be no points or positions within a rhizome: "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be" (7). Neither mimetic nor organic, a rhizome is a mobile and bifurcating series of lines; it only ever attempts to map, never resolve.

How appropriate, then, that *Syriana* deals with an actual hypothetical "remapping" of the Middle East. As "the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight" (21), *Syriana* works to outline the map of law, military, politics, economics, and terrorism that is the global oil industry. The terrorist act in the film's conclusion shows its detachability; the globe-spanning locales in which the story take place show its connectability; the double and double-double crossings by CIA agents show its reversibility; and the anti-trust regulators in the film's legal plotline show its modifiability. The young Pakistani character, victimized

plot as too complex to follow. As Roger Ebert states with precision: "we're not really supposed to follow [the plot], we're supposed to be surrounded by it. Since none of the characters understand the whole picture, why should we?" (emphasis added). The film has thus utilized the structure of the rhizome in its plot structure to illuminate the rhizomatic quality of its subject matter. The viewer is supposed to get lost in the film's complex story and be even more bewildered by its fruition. Like every useful answer to a difficult question, the GSP reveals even more complex questions instead of offering a tidy resolution.

In order to present this rhizomatic subject matter, the GSP's form must be rhizomatic, which in turn requires a rhizomatic production process: "To attain the multiple, one must have a method that effectively constructs it" (Deleuze 22). The complex, erratic productions of *Traffic* and *Syriana* are examples of such a process that constructs the multiple. Referring to it as his "\$49 million Dogme film" (as qtd. in Waxman 315), Soderbergh directed and shot *Traffic* with the spontaneity and freedom he enjoyed with his self-financed efforts. Three months, ten cities, 110 locations, and 163 speaking parts: the shoot was a frantic affair. The cast and crew travelled light and quick, "like the Grateful Dead" (as qtd. in 317)

according to Benecio Del Toro. Unable to secure permission to shoot in the White House, Soderbergh and Douglas went on a tour and stole footage guerilla-style. This is true rhizomatic technique: "Speed turns the point into a line!" (Deleuze 24). *Syriana* was a similarly complex endeavour; shooting took place in over a dozen locations around the globe, including Geneva, Dubai (the first Hollywood production in the U.A.E.), Egypt, Tehran, London, Morocco, New York, Texas, Maryland, Baltimore, and Washington D.C. Thus, both films can be seen to exhibit a rhizomatic theme (the globally interconnected problems with which each film engages), a rhizomatic structure (an overwhelming global web-of-life plotline), and a rhizomatic construction (a complex, unpredictable production process). The GSP – in construction, structure, and theme – is a true personification of the rhizome.

To return to Dresser's earlier question: yes, hypertext is at the core of the future of cinema, but its truest contemporary incarnation is not the global noir and its flaccid intertextual referencing, but the GSP and its truly rhizomatic embodiment. And yes, the future of cinema is here if filmmakers use the logic of Deleuze's rhizome. Only by utilizing a concept capable of rendering the multiple and heterogeneous nature of our interconnected globalized world can cinema hope to confront our most pressing global problems. To rewrite Manuel Castells' famous proclamation about the network society: the logic of the rhizome is more powerful than the power in the rhizome.<sup>9</sup>

### Conclusion

The War on Drugs is a plague. Its extreme inefficiency actually increases drug use, its estimated 19 billion dollar budget is a tremendous drain on the American economy, it abandons junkies threatened by unclean needles and contaminated product, it contributes to high-crime zones, it replaces honesty with lies in education, it facilitates organized crime, it ignores the fact that cigarettes and alcohol cause many more fatalities

than heroine or cocaine ever will, it hinders legitimate scientific research, and its racially biased enforcement is the central reason for an exploding prison population. As Robert Wakefield so poignantly states in *Traffic*'s conclusion, "If there is a war on drugs, then many of our family members are the enemy. And I don't know how you wage war on your own family."

Oil addiction is one of the gravest problems humanity faces; its environmental and political-economic effects are widespread and devastating. The burning of fossil fuels is the primary cause of climate change, making droughts, extreme weather, and rising sea levels a reality in our not-too-distant future. North Americans are the world's biggest perpetrators of releasing greenhouse gas emissions, and our reluctance to curb our pollution or embrace technology for cleaner, renewable energy is inexcusable. A much tougher to comprehend consequence of oil addiction is its effect on human rights and poverty. Oil-related environmental disasters in developing countries are rampant, as transnational oil companies take advantage of weak governments desperate for foreign investment. *Syriana* works hard to dramatize the difficulty – and the urgency – in combating this addiction to oil. According to Roffman and Purdy, "the Hollywood social problem film represents a significant social and artistic achievement, marshalling the resources of film to provide a vivid commentary on the times" (vii). Through its propagation of a global social consciousness, its commitment to realism, and a utilization of the Deleuzian rhizome, the GSP has reinvigorated the potential for far-reaching social and political commentary in mainstream Hollywood cinema.

### Works Cited

Brooke, Michael. "Social Problem Films: British cinema and postwar social change." ScreenOnline. <<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1074067/index.html>>  
Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari.

*A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Dresser, David. "Global Noir: Genre Film in the Age of Transnationalism." *Film Genre Reader III*. Ed. Barry Keith Grant. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.

Ebert, Roger. "Review: *Syriana*." [rogerebert.com](http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20051208/EWS/51130002/1023). 9 Dec. 2005. <<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20051208/EWS/51130002/1023>>.

Feldman, Seth. "Footnote to Fact: The Docudrama." *Film Genre Reader*. Ed. Barry Keith Grant. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.  
Krauthammer, Charles. "Oscars for Osama." *The Washington Post*. 3 March 2006. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/02/AR2006030201209.html>>.

Neale, Steve. *Genre and Hollywood*. New York and London: Routledge, 2000.

Roffman, Peter and Jim Purdy. *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

Rosenberg, Justin. "Globalization Theory: A Post Mortem." *International Politics*. No. 42, 2005.

Sloan, Kay. *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Waxman, Sharon. *Rebels on the Backlot: Six Maverick Directors and How They Conquered the Hollywood Studio System*. New York: W. Morrow, 2005.

Wilmington, Michael. "City Symphony." *The Criterion Collection: Short Cuts*. <<http://www.criterionco.com/asp/release.asp?id=265&eid=389&section=essay>>.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11*. London: Verso, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> The original statement is "The logic of the network is more powerful than the power in the network," Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 500.