“Syriana” [2005], written and directed by Stephen Gaghan, based partly on the experiences of CIA agent Robert Baer, and very much a reflection of the efforts of George Clooney [and Gaghan] to get filmgoers to think. This was the same year Clooney made “Good Night and Good Luck.” Clooney produced the film and received the Oscar for supporting actor. In preparing the script, Gaghan was actually in very dangerous situations from time to time.

“Syriana” is a disturbing film. It has been referred to as a “non-narrative” or “non-linear film.” Other films in this category include “Crash” and “Babel.” There are a lot of characters and the action jumps around. This was the first film I have ever seen where, at one point, I had no idea which character was being referred to by others. There is a lot of detail which is relevant to, but not necessary for, an understanding of the basic story. Still, there are times when one may be irritated about being confused. It is about ambiguity and responsibility. It is connected to many of the problems we have considered this semester, including: Power, McWorld and Jihad, the oil industry, human nature, terrorism, American values, torture [some scenes are intense], rich and poor, the capacity for evil, the capacity for self-deception, unanticipated consequences of actions taken for possibly good reasons, and ways in which the world is flat. It is also a “thriller.”