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MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

Come Fly With Me:
Analyzing the F-35 Aircraft Acquisition Discourse to study Incivility in Question Period

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The Major Research Paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Professional Communication

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September 8th, 2011

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ABSTRACT

The main objective behind the parliamentary practice of Question Period is to ensure that the government is held accountable to the people. Rather than being a political accountability tool and a showcase of public discourse, these deliberations are most often displays of vitriolic political rhetoric. I will be focusing my research on the ways in which incivil political discourse permeates the political mediascape with respect to one instance in Canadian politics - the acquisition of the F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter. I believe that incivility in the political discourse of Question Period must be understood within the mechanics of the contemporary public sphere. By interrogating the complexities of how political discourse is being mediatized, produced and consumed within the prevailing ideological paradigms, I identify some of the contemporary social, cultural and political practices that produce incivility in parliamentary discourse.

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Introduction

Oral Questions, known informally as Question Period (QP), is a constituent element of Westminster-style parliamentary democracy: it confers Members of Parliament (MPs) "[t]he right to seek information and the right to hold the Government accountable [which] are recognized as fundamental to our system of parliamentary government" (House of Commons, Compendium). Question Period (QP) provides MPs an opportunity to pose questions of a timely and important nature to the Prime Minister or other members of the government. The main objective behind this parliamentary practice is to ensure that the government is held accountable to the people. But according to the Public Policy Forum, two-third of Canadians surveyed by the Pollara National Dialogue Poll agree that Question Period is "just a forum for politicians to grandstand for the media and try to score cheap political points (Mitchell)." Academics, journalists, pundits and MPs have also contributed to the public discourse on the lack of civility during QP, questioning its validity as a functional deliberative democratic forum (Broadbent; Chong; Delacourt; Galloway; Kheiriddin; Libin; Murphy; Saxby Hill). In an attempt to restore civility in parliament MP Michael Chong put forward a private members motion M-517 for the reform of QP, which was approved 235-44 in the House of Commons on Wednesday, October 6, 2010.

The public could be quite right to point out the lack of decorum, co-operation and the few discussions of substance that go on at this parliamentary event where issues of pertinence are expected to be addressed by the elected officials. Rather than being a socio-political accountability tool and a showcase of persuasive public discourse, these deliberations are most often displays of hostile, vitriolic and cantankerous political rhetoric. Incivil political discursive

interactions have a pernicious effect on the political milieu. Eric Uslaner makes the astute observation that political discursive incivility stems from a lack of trust that pervades between political actors (Uslaner). According to Uslaner, rather than viewing the opposition as a group with an opposing world view, politicians today are distrustful of the opposition. This lack of trust Uslaner notes is not merely a political phenomenon but reflective of the contemporary social and cultural milieu.

Slavoj Žižek suggests the lack of trust stems from "the liberal multiculturalist's basic ideological operation: the 'culturalization of politics' (Žižek, Tolerance as an Ideological Category 660)". The 'culturalization of politics' can be understood as the communicative displacement of social, economic and political problems from their respective domains into the cultural domain. When political problems are conceived of as originating from within the cultural domain, political actors are incapable of developing the appropriate public policy initiatives and political legislations to adequately address these civic concerns. Žižek argues that once genuine political differences are sublimated into 'cultural' differences, they are transformed into obstinate qualities that are non-negotiable, but must merely be tolerated (Žižek, Tolerance as an Ideological Category 660). Wendy Brown concurs with this strand of thought in her own analysis. She writes, "The cultivation of tolerance as a political end implicitly constitutes a rejection of politics as a domain in which conflict can be productively articulated and addressed, a domain in which citizens can be transformed by their participation (Brown 89)." Brown elaborates that, rhetorically, tolerance is communicated as a discursive strategy that enables one to cope with rather than accept difference. When tolerance is communicated as the acceptance of difference, it is a virtue; on the other hand when communicated as a coping strategy, it is a

practice (Brown 13). Brown asserts that in politics, tolerance is a practice, and a powerful discursive tool. In parliamentary discourse, the opposition's point of view must not merely be tolerated by the executive in power; rather the opposition's questions must be acknowledged and deliberated upon. It is with Brown's assertion in mind that I engage in a critical reading of MP Michael Chong's motion. Chong's Private Members Motion M-517, with regard to the reform of Question Period reads,

> "That the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to recommend changes to the Standing Orders and other conventions governing Oral Questions, and to consider, among other things,
>
> (i) elevating decorum and fortifying the use of discipline by the Speaker, to strengthen the dignity and authority of the House,
>
> (ii) lengthening the amount of time given for each question and each answer,
>
> (iii) examining the convention that the Minister questioned need not respond,
>
> (iv) allocating half the questions each day for Members, whose names and order of recognition would be randomly selected,
>
> (v) dedicating Wednesday exclusively for questions to the Prime Minister,
>
> (vi) dedicating Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday for questions to Ministers other than the Prime Minister in a way that would require Ministers be present two of the four days to answer questions concerning their portfolio, based on a published schedule that would rotate and that would ensure an equitable distribution of Ministers across the four days; and that the Committee report its findings to the House, with proposed changes to the Standing Orders and other conventions, within six months of the adoption of this order (Chong, Motion for

Parliamentary Reform: Private Members Motion M-517, with regard to the reform of Question Period)".

The ideological premise of Chong's bill is that during QP the executive in power need only tolerate questions from an opposition who is by virtue of their conduct, the civil Other. The term "tolerance" here is revelatory as Žižek writes, "[O]ne "tolerates" something one does not approve of, but cannot abolish, either because one is not strong enough to do so or because one is benevolent enough to allow the Other to retain its illusions (Žižek, Living in the End Times 46)." In this way tolerance becomes sutured into the lack of trust and incivility continuum. Tolerance towards the political opposition (the civil Other) articulates itself first as assertion of superiority and second as the hatred Others who fail to adhere to this idea of tolerance (Žižek, Revolution at the Gates: Zizek on Lenin, the 1917 Writings 225). Žižek's concept of tolerance discourse and how its renders the Other critically informs the ideological agenda of Chong's call for parliament reform. The call for civility is a ploy to deliberate in an institution where the political opposition (the civil Other) is tolerated by the executive in power to the extent that the opposition's political position is not intrusive (to the workings of the executive in power), to the extent the political opposition (the civil Other) is not really an engaged political opposition.

Chong's proposal can then be understood as an effort to stifle parliamentary discursive practices insofar as it rendered into a forum where the ruling executive encounters the political "Other deprived of their Otherness (Žižek, Passion in the Era of Decaffeinated Belief)." By advocating for the Speaker to police the discursive regime in parliament Chong's conception of civil parliamentary discourse only gives agency to hegemonic discourse. Furthermore, Chong's

attempt at ‘restoring civility in Ottawa’ suggests a melancholic loss of civility, a longing for a previously existing patriarchal order and a fetishizing of this variant of civility. A cultural studies approach would suggest that any and all mechanisms that mandate the idea of parliamentary civility do so by obfuscating mechanisms. It is vitally important to parse the definitional terrain of civility to take into account the critique of domination and of freedom, inequality, indifference and alienated subjectivities; those dissonant subject positions where civility incapacitates one to affect power.

Research Focus

I will be focusing my research on the ways in which incivil political discourse permeates the political mediascape with respect to one instance in Canadian politics. I believe that incivility in the political discourse of Question Period must be understood within the mechanics of the contemporary public sphere. By interrogating the complexities of how political discourse is being mediatized, produced and consumed within the prevailing ideological paradigms, I hope to identify some of the contemporary social, cultural and political practices that produce incivility in parliamentary discourse. I also hope to acquire a scholarly appreciation of the role of the media in reinforcing incivility during Question Period through an investigation of the discourse surrounding the content, qualities and impact of Question Period, an important public component of the Canadian political process.

To study the incivility in parliamentary discourse I will be focusing my discussion on the parliamentary deliberations that took place around the topic of the F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) acquisition in the third session of the 40th Parliament. Between May 27, 2010 and

March 25, 2011 several opposition MPs raised the question in Question Period as to why was it that the Government did not go through a tendering process to acquire the F-35s. Opposition MPs mentioned how the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed by the previous government with the JSF program did not translate into a *carte blanche* for the Government to acquire the F-35 JSF aircrafts. Another major point of contention was that opposition efforts at probing the Conservative government to reveal the criteria employed by the Defence Minister to determine why the F-35 JSF was chosen as the only aircraft that would meet the Canadian Forces bill of requirements were met by stonewalling tactics. The Parliamentary Budget Office report that Government officials had not accounted for the total cost of ownership in its estimated figures of the F-35 JSF aircrafts is indicative of the duplicitous and in-turn incivil nature of parliamentary discourse.

Wetherell et al. writes that, "discourse analysis emerges from profound changes in conceptualizations of communication, culture, language use and function, and the relationship between representation and reality (Wetherell, Taylor and & Yates i)." Using an 'interpretive bricolage' approach I will be examining the discursive conditions that produce incivility in parliamentary discourse (Denzin and Lincoln). Teun A. van Dijk writes, "[C]ritical-political discourse analysis deals with the reproduction of political power, power abuse or domination through political discourse (van Dijk 11)." Working as an 'interpretive *bricoleur*' I will piece together a set of texts regarding the government's acquisition of F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Force Jets (F-35 Jets), that will triangulate the research around the social, political and cultural factors that produce incivil political discourse (Denzin and Lincoln 4). I contend that incivility does not reside primarily in the text and talk of parliamentary discourse, rather incivility resides

in the *sprezzatura*[1] of mediatized performances of political discourse. The government officials evaded questions posed by the opposition pertaining to the true cost of acquisition of the aircrafts; they obfuscated how the data was presented using inventive strategies and misled the opposition on several occasions. For that reason, I will be analyzing the parliamentary deliberations and the ensuing media discussions, thus engaging in a textual analysis with a contextual inquiry. By theorizing the role played by communication within the contemporary socio-technological milieu I hope to raise awareness of the prevailing social context such as: the public's misgivings about bureaucracies, lack of confidence in public officials, and greater citizen apathy as well as technological factors such as: converging media carriers, platforms and technologies and changing patterns in media content creation, distribution and consumption (Bennett and Iyengar) which are possible contributing factors to the production of incivil political discourse.

Adopting a bricolage approach provides me with a range of methodological and theoretical strategies that can be unfolded into the research. By incorporating the critical theoretical stance of the Frankfurt School in my research project, I intend to take the Horkheimerian position. Whereas his endeavours in the United States included a moral obligation to expose and learn from the failures and weaknesses of a capitalist system, thereby creating the space for desirable changes to flourish within the system, my pursuit will endeavour to accomplish the same analysis for the Canadian Parliamentary Discourse in Question Period –

[1] "an easy facility in accomplishing difficult actions which hides the conscious effort that went into them." Castiglione, Baldesar. The Book of the Courtier: The Singleton Translation. Ed. Daniel Javitch. New York: Norton, 2002.

expose and learn from the failures and weaknesses of Question Period as it exists and thereby dwell upon the possible changes that could flourish within the system.

Literature Review

It would be a discursive disservice to hamstring the definition of civility as a kinder, gentler House of Commons where parliamentarians strive for basic human decency. This notion of civility can be traced back to its Greco-Roman roots based on Natural Reason. Through this lens, civility is a matter of good character and civic virtue. Christian Theologians would chime in to elucidate how civility bears fruit from Divine Law. Under these auspices, civility implies the regulation of emotions, speech and body. In *Rude Democracy*, Susan Herbst takes on the challenge of coming up with a working definition of civility for the 21st century. She defines civility as a,"[C]onstructive engagement with others through argument, deliberation and discourse" (Herbst 19). Herbst asserts that we understand the demanding nature of discourse and how argument and deliberation play a pivotal role in our conceptual understanding of civility. She goes on to say that it is imperative within parliamentary discourse that deliberative practices strive to reach consensus. Knowing fully well that within national political deliberations divisive issues such as race, class, region, ethnicity, gender, and ideology are more than likely to set us apart rather than bring us together which Herbst writes is a completely acceptable consequence. Herbst also advises caution regarding the motives of those political participants engaged in the civility process, for they may be advancing a party agenda, personal notoriety and/or political career advancement.

Susan Herbst incorporates another indispensable constitutive element to her definition of civility, namely 'emotional affirmation' (Herbst 10). Herbst postulates that we live in an emotion based culture, where our frame of reference to understand civility comes from how it is that we are made to feel in the process. As a populace we get our cultural cues on how it is we are supposed to feel from our engagement with popular and personal media (Herbst 10). Herbst establishes two co-ordinate axes through which to plot and define civility, emotional affirmation on the one axis and intense immediate communication on the other. In other words civility can be defined as feeling good while communicating with others. Axiomatically we can say that when we are engaged in an uncomfortable interaction we are most likely to feel apprehensive. This idea becomes all the more relevant as we look at ideologically charged in-civil mediated political discourse. I will be reviewing political economy of the media scholarship to gather an appreciation of how the rhetorical idea of civility circulates within late capitalism. Communication and media studies scholarship will be reviewed to map out the ideological effects of communication and culture. Furthermore, literature about how contemporary communication models operate gain an understanding of its social and technological effects on of deliberative politics will be reviewed.

Rhetoric and incivility within the spaces of Late Capitalism

In order to participate as active citizens and to be engaged in the culture and politics of late capitalism, it would be advantageous to adopt Ronald Walter Greene's suggestion that we take into account the neo-liberal logic that circumscribes politics, economics and discourse (Greene, Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor 200). In Greene's opinion, the idea of the politician as rhetorical citizen no longer holds true. He supplants the idea of the rhetorical citizen with a materialist approach that posits three

compelling concepts: “communicative labour, money/speech and neo-liberal governance (Greene, Rhetorical Capital: Communicative Labor, Money/Speech, and Neo-Liberal Governance 328)”. The idea of communicative labour is paramount to our understanding of civility in Question Period. Communicative labour reveals the alienating process by which political discursive production becomes economic production. Rendered through this lens, the parliamentarian engaged in political debate performs two functions;

(i) material labour, as he/she goes through the bureaucratic motions and

(ii) Communicative labour, wherein he/she produces information which has use-value for the media system.

Greene describes communicative labour as the process by which the logic of capitalist accumulation and social wealth appropriation is executed through the social attributes of communication: namely deliberation, persuasion, cooperation, etc. (Greene, Rhetorical Capital: Communicative Labor, Money/Speech, and Neo-Liberal Governance 328). In other words, the parliamentarian’s communicative labour goes into producing the informational content of the commodity, the commodity being the news-clip worthy sound bite, which is of use-value to the media institutions. Therefore, the politician’s communicative labour has reformatted him/her in terms of capitalist enterprise and theatrics. Politicians are aware that their electoral prowess depends on how the mediascape portrays them to public. This arrangement in and of itself is quite revelatory with respect to where the locus of power resides between these two social institutions: the parliament and the media institutions. It is possible that within late capitalism, media institutions are neither subservient nor equal to the political institution; the media institutions are by and large the true seat of political power in the nation.

Karyln Kohrs Campbell explains that with the ability to control what content the public are privy to, when the public have access to the content and whether an opposing point-of-view is broadcast is presented along with it as well, media institutions ipso facto have the power to influence who the next ruling political administration will be and the policies under which the public will be governed (Campbell 41). Jodi Dean writes, "Politics has become a domain of financially mediated and professionalized practices centred on advertising, public relations and the means of mass communication... [T]he standards of finance- and consumption-driven entertainment culture set the very terms of democratic governance today (Dean, Communicative capitalism: circulation and the foreclosure of politics 55)." Thereby Dean writes, communication has disavowed its political project and acknowledges freely and openly its unbridled support for the capitalist enterprise (Dean, Communicative capitalism: circulation and the foreclosure of politics 56).

Gresham's Law: How mediatized in-civil political discourse remains in circulation

Other research suggests that in a media-nurtured desertion of sombre political discourse, gravitas laden deliberations are consistently being expunged by a mix of pedestrian, peripheral media discourses trafficking the pomp and performance of celebrity, spectacle and pseudo-events. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell employs Gresham's Law, (the economic principle which states that bad money drives good money out of circulation) to explain how political discourse is mediatized. Campbell explains that since the political discourse that circulates in the mediascape about politicians and political issues includes those discourses that have been bankrolled by corporations, only those political discourses will be promoted by the media that abide by the logic of media economics and those political discourses that do not generate revenue for the establishment are cast-off from the mediascape (Campbell 48). Campbell's argument best

explains how incivility is reinforced in today's mediatized political discourses. Since incivil political discourse generates revenue for media institutions, the mediascape incessantly continues to produce incivil politically polarizing material.

In a diverse information environment, it is easy for consumers to cherry-pick news media sources and remain faithful to a media source that they find concordant to their ideological point-of-view. This type of consumer behaviour provides the media organization with the financial incentive to cater their viewership's political and ideological preferences (Mullainathan and Shleifer). Moreover, Arceneaux et al. study states that politically polarized consumers are overparticular in their selection of news sources (Arceneaux, Johnson and Murphy 4). The mediatized incivil political discourse that the public is subject to; remains in circulation because the market imperatives are calibrated to do so. The operational logic of late capitalism is ultimately about profitability and the pursuit of profit affects the very fibre of the news media coverage which in turn adversely impacts the quantity and quality of public discourse.

Explicitness without understanding: The ideological effects of communication and culture

In order to analyze the political discourse emanating from Question Period it is essential to address the link between media texts and social action. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write, "communication is the form of capitalist production in which capital has succeeded in submitting society entirely and globally to its regime, suppressing all alternative paths (Hardt and Negri 347)." Jodi Dean writes that 'communicative capitalism' thwarts the realization of Tocquevillian ideals of democracy such as the redistribution of wealth because 'access, information and communication' have become incorporated into the techno-corporatist modus operandi (Dean, Publicity's Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy 3). The

operation of a contemporary democracy is dependent upon the techno-corporatist media machinery. The political communication agenda is mobilized only through television appearances, internet penetration, telephone campaigns, etc. Peter Dahlgren further problematizes this notion as he writes, “Politics no longer exists as a reality taking place outside the media...Rather, politics is increasingly organized as a media phenomenon, planned and executed for and with the co-operation of the media (Dahlgreen 85).” The overdetermination of contemporary techno-culture, media culture and political culture suggests that the dialectic between audience (entertainment) and citizen (information) is no longer as distinct as one was the case. Jeffery Jones notes that the result of this blurring of the entertainment-information dichotomy is that in the contemporary milieu, active citizenship is a textual engagement (Jones 209). The politically active members engage with each other and their elected political officials through the mediascape. Within the communicative capitalist regime the discursive practices of the politically engaged public can be articulated as the sum total of their selecting, processing and interacting with various political news media texts in the networked mediascape. That is, in the contemporary political milieu participation does not imply institutional (union, church, service organization) memberships rather engagement in the democratic process happens through textual interactions in the mediascape.

In order to theorize the ideological impact of the contemporary mediascape upon the public, the classical culture industry thesis as posited by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer must be upgraded. Horkheimer and Adorno’s concern that “the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest” deserves further explanation (Adorno and Horkheimer).” As Jodi Dean remarks publicity forms

the ideological bedrock of technoculture, performatively naturalizing communicative capitalism (Dean, Publicity's Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy 4). The contemporary culture industry functions as a hotbed where free-market values and media technologies are wedded together. This arrangement makes way for the 'active' involvement and incorporation of audiences into the structures and products of the contemporary culture industry. As Susan Buck-Morss writes, "The machinery of modern power was not so much hidden behind the ideology of mass utopia as it was produced by it (Buck-Morss 220)." The upshot of which is the medium colonizes the message.

In the case of media institutions, celebrity discourse is integrated into political news coverage thus creating infotainment; an amorphous expansion of the mediatized public sphere (Thussu). At the most basic level, the ideological role and function of mediatized incivil political discourse seems unambiguous: to sustain false consciousness. However in late-capitalism this is accomplished from disparate commanding heights. Neo-liberal technocratic logic is operationalized to do so, by forging transactional relationships between reticular capitalist structures and interpellating the public into the consumerist ethos. Once ingratiated into the neo-liberal mode of governance, and consumer-citizen subject position, the denouement experienced by the public is chrono-economic stress; William Millard defines the term chrono-economic stress as "the psycho-linguistic effects of [one's] awareness of the limits to the time, bandwidth, money, attention, and any other resources that he or she can devote to any given piece of discourse (Millard 159)". In conjunction with selective exposure to media sources, selections of their own accord in news media sources and by information sorting algorithms otherwise known as 'filter bubbles' (Ouellette; Eli Parser) the public access ideologically stratified information

narrowcasts. Contemporary research in ‘video malaise theory’, ‘hostile media effect’ and ‘narcotizing dysfunction’ suggest that exposure to mediatized incivil political discourse leads the public to use adopt incivil terminology in order to express their own political opinions (Arceneaux, Johnson and Murphy; Bennett and Iyengar; Gervais; Mutz and Reeves). As the issue of the F-35 aircraft acquisition began to be debated in the media. The primary agenda of the news media sources was informing the public of the industry opportunities, the high-paying jobs, economic gains that were at stake if the F-35 deal were to fall through. The government’s failure to supply opposition MPs with sufficient documentation about the estimated cost of the F-35 jets were only addressed after the contempt of parliament report had been filed.

Jean Baudrillard writes, “The task of all media and information today is to produce this real, this extra real (interviews, live coverage, movies, TV-truth, etc.). There is too much of it, we fall into obscenity and pornography. As in pornography, a kind of zoom takes us too near the real, which never existed and only ever came into view at a certain distance (Baudrillard 84)”. The contemporary mediascape is singularly devoted to producing and distributing content that is both explicit and obscene/ob-scene. Baudrillard’s idea of the ob-scene is not confined to the terrain of sexual pornography but its symptomatic of a larger shift in media culture towards social explicitness and exclusive content (Taylor). Paul Taylor describes this phenomenon as ‘social porn’(Taylor). Social porn manifests itself in the mediascape in the form of sports porn, décor porn, food porn, gadget porn, music porn, politics porn, etc. Taylor describes this production and circulation of smug, shallow, redundant, hyperbolic content in the mediasphere as the trafficking of “explicitness without understanding” (Taylor).

A Žižekian analysis of ideology becomes indispensable to critically evaluate the operational logic of the mediatized political discourses. Baudrillard's hyphenated concept of the ob-scene signals the semiotic decline of the actor's performative legibility. Žižek explains away 'explicitness without understanding' by pointing to consumer goods available in the contemporary market place bereft of their maleficent qualities like decaffeinated coffee as coffee sans caffeine, non-alcoholic beer as beer sans alcohol, diet cola as cola sans sugar, so on and so forth (Žižek, Passion in the Era of Decaffeinated Belief). Taylor echoes this idea of engaging with the material-object without concern for its 'maleficent qualities' when he describes how 'Food Porn'/cooking shows are viewed by audiences; 'Food Porn' is cooking sans the dirty dishes (Taylor). Contemporary politics by the same logic when mediated through the infotainment format becomes politics sans politics: a venue where the politician can engage in playful banter and not be held accountable for public actions.

Theorizing the role of communication within the socio-technological context of deliberative politics

It is vitally important to consider "the pivotal role that media institutions play in organizing the images and discourses through which people make sense of the world (Murdock and Golding 60)." The contemporary socio-technological context, within which mediated discourses are being circulated, is one in which as Bennett and Iyengar note, the present-day public no longer maintain their institutional (union, church, service organization) affiliations as eagerly as was the case earlier. Bennett and Iyengar suggest that burgeoning information sources and personalized information channels have resulted in the creation of fragmented audiences who are isolated from the public sphere. Theorizing the role of communication within this socio-

technological context anticipates an acute awareness of the prevailing extrinsic social factors such as: the public's misgivings about bureaucracies, lack of confidence in public officials, and greater citizen apathy as well as technological factors such as: converging media carriers, platforms and technologies and changing patterns in media content creation, distribution and consumption (Bennett and Iyengar).

Jurgen Habermas' communication model of deliberative politics is constituted of two fundamental premises, "the maintenance of a self-regulating media system and of proper feedback between public sphere and civil society" (Habermas 411). However, as Jodi Dean explains contemporary politics is an overdetermined amalgam of finance, media, technology and culture (Dean, Communicative capitalism: circulation and the foreclosure of politics). The public sphere as conceived by Habermas has ruptured. The present-day communication schema operates closer to the idea put forth by Chaffee and Metzger who had forecast that the news agenda is effectively being set by the public who 'up-vote' news media content based on their preferences (Chaffee and Metzger 375). In other words, news media content is produced based on media-economic imperatives. Market segments are created to target consumer preferences including political news preferences (Mullainathan and Shleifer). Robert McChesney writes, "We have a population ripe for manipulation by powerful public relations firms and political consultants who are experts in sound bites and seductive imagery (McChesney 126)." Jurgen Habermas considers this scenario pathologizing to mediatized political communication, and considers it a direct consequence of the "selective access to and uneven participation of citizens in mediated communication (Habermas 421)." As market imperatives begin to dictate the flow of mediated political communication, Habermas notes the paralyzing effect of civil society's

capacity to champion the issues of relevance in public affairs (Habermas 422). The Question Period discussions around the procurement of the F-35 JSF Jets were essentially about how the Conservative government had not engaged in an open and competitive tender process for a military hardware acquisition. The mediated political communication never picked up on this aspect of the deliberations suggesting how market imperatives such as the industrial benefits guided the media narrative.

In the contemporary mediascape, news events are no longer received from an 'information commons'/network news channel, rather they are received from diverse new media sources (Iyengar and Hahn; Bennett and Iyengar). The contemporary mediascape narrowcasts content to niche markets with loyal audiences built-in and where steady ratings are assured (Mullainathan and Shleifer). This mode of news programming came into as a result of the fragmentation of network news. The operational logic of network news was to inform the general public by exposing the audience to balanced news content through its broadcasts (Mutz and Reeves). With an abundance of media channels to pick and choose content from, members of the public began to exercise selective viewing practices. Those uninterested in politics make the lifestyle choice of opting out of any engagement with political news media. And those who do seek out news material prefer programming that is reported from an ideological perspective reflective of their own.

Consumer behaviour propelled by 'chrono-economic stress' (Millard 1997) and selective exposure to media outlets has lead to the creation of informational haves and have-nots. This segregation of the audience into informational-haves who are politically informed and

informational-have-nots who are civically disengaged is problematic because the politically informed make up only a modest portion of the total population, but these ardent consumers of news media who prefer their information from select sources are partially responsible for propelling the polarization of news (Abramowitz and Saunders; Iyengar and Hahn). This type of news media reception is accompanied by a phenomenon that Arceneaux et al. describe as 'oppositional media hostility'; that is not only do the audience prefer politically biased news, they are untrusting and hostile towards media sources that do not validate their ideological position (Arceneaux, Johnson and Murphy).

This confluence of societal change in cultural norms, communication technologies and media uptake, exerts a corresponding transformation in people's social, psychological and behavioural constitution as well. Neo-liberal late capitalism operates on the premise of privileging information culture (while subjugating the knowledge worker). The totalizing logic of late-capitalism is at work in this conceptualization, for information is deprived of its political potential and exists merely to serve the capitalist master. Late Capitalist logic influences both the quantity and quality public discourse that is produced. The cornucopia of media outlets and information sources presented the public with sound-bites from MPs who spoke about the economic benefits that would arise from the F-35 JSF aircraft acquisition. The opposition MP's questions were misconstrued by the government as political bickering and the opposition MP's request for information was disregarded. The Conservative government effectively communicated to the public the positive economic returns that would be arise from pursuing the F-35 military contract. In this process the government capitalized on the public's chrono-

economic stress to push through military-industrial agenda while muffling the opposition's accusations of sole-sourced military procurement.

Methodology

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach sheds light on how it is that language is rendered through ideology and how those in power use language to maintain the status quo. Norman Fairclough writes that, "CDA begins from some social perception of a discourse related problem in some part of social life" (2001: 236). The discourse related problem that I am studying is understanding how incivility permeates through the parliamentary deliberations. Teun A. van Dijk writes, "[C]ritical-political discourse analysis deals with the reproduction of political power, power abuse or domination through political discourse (van Dijk 1997: 11)." The CDA for this paper is focused around the political narrative and discourse surrounding the acquisition of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Lightning II aircrafts [Appendix A]. The F-35 JSF acquisition process highlights the textured and layered nature of incivil political discourse.

I will be engaging in this CDA by interrogating these parliamentary deliberations by looking at how ancillary texts such as news media coverage, think tank reports, press releases, and documentaries shape the political narrative. The CDA will probe into how the government officials presented information with regard to the acquisition of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Lightning II aircrafts to the opposition party members. By engaging in a dialectic with the political 'network of practice' (Fairclough); tracing how the content produced within Question Period travels through the various communication channels and mediums, I hope to gain an appreciation for the ideologies that are laden within these texts and how they are received by the

public. And in the process attempt to triangulate where the incivility of parliamentary discourse lies.

Parliamentary Findings: Discussions about the F-35 acquisition in Question Period

On May 27, 2010 when Defence Minister Peter MacKay was posed the question by NDP Defence Critic MP Jack Harris during Question Period if the government had "already decided to purchase planes from the joint strike group fighter program?" Defence Minister Peter MacKay's reply was,

> " Mr. Chair, the hon. member is mistaken. None whatsoever. I should have referred to this with the more generic term that this is the "next generation" of aircraft. The joint strike fighter is one of the two aircraft, and there may be others. But I think those are the two main contenders that we are looking at. Obviously we want to get the best value, the best aircraft, and we have already embarked upon investments to ensure that happens… I just want to be very clear on the record that the reference to the next generation of fighter aircraft does not preclude a competition, and an open and transparent one. (Hansard May 27 2010)."

Defence Minister Peter MacKay's statements from May 27, 2010 clearly demonstrated that he was aware of the opposition MPs concerns about the government's sole-sourced military acquisition process. The opposition MPs would probe Minister MacKay in the months to come about the lack of an open competition. The Defence Minister responded to those questions by citing the competition that took place between Lockheed Martin and Boeing under the direction of the US Department of Defence to select the builder of next generation JSF in 2001 (Jorgenson). This clearly indicates that the Defence Minister's responses to queries from the Opposition MPs in Question Period were not meant to answer or clarify the opposition MPs queries rather they were meant to confuse and obfuscate the facts of the matter.

On July 16, 2010, at a press conference Defence Minister Peter MacKay, Industry Minister Tony Clement and Public Works Minister Rona Ambrose announced the government's C$9 billion plan to buy sixty five F-35 JSF aircrafts. This press conference is an example of Ministers MacKay, Clement and Ambrose engaged in 'communicative labour' (Greene). The ministers' 'communicative labour' reformatted them in terms of the military industrial enterprise and media theatrics (Greene). The most expensive military acquisition in Canadian military history to date was being announced and questions from the media in regards to the total cost of ownership of the fleet of F-35 jets were not addressed. Although the Defence Minister's statement from the May 27, 2010 Question Period had inferred a competitive bid was in the works, his statements at the July 16, 2010 press conference failed to mention how the F-35 was selected. Much to the chagrin of the opposition the F-35 JSF acquisition went through without much regard for customary checks and balances; the sole-sourcing process was being abused; and the contract negotiations were non-transparent and non-competitive. Liberal opposition leader Michael Ignatieff referred to the process as a "secretive, unaccountable decision to proceed with this contract (Blanchfield)." This event highlights how the government was able to control the media narrative with regards to the F-35 JSF aircraft acquisition. By hosting the press conference in the summer, when the parliament was not in session, the government had thwarted the opposition parties' ability to furnish their opposing point of view to the media. The political discourse surrounding the F-35 JSF acquisition was predominantly shaped by the media 'filter bubble' created by the executive in power at this time (Parser). The government's media narrative highlighted the economic benefits that would arise from the military deal and how it was the patriotic responsibility of the government to ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces had the equipment necessary to perform their duties. The 'chrono-economically stressed' public

would only hear of the economic opportunities that would arise from the purchase of the F-35 jets, the discrepancies of the military procurement process was muted (Millard).

Photo credit: Master Corporal Angela Abbey © 2010 DND-MDN Canada

On September 15, 2010 Rona Ambrose, Minister of Public Works and Government Services, stated before the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence (SCND), "[T]he procurement process does not drive the requirements; the requirements drive the procurement process" (SCND 2010). In light of the significant role played by the Aerospace Industries Association of Canada (AIAC) in influencing the government decision to opt for the single-sourced F-35 contract and the number of senior Department of National Defence (DND) personnel who have moved from government services to the private sector with little accountability or concern about the conflict of interest, Minister Ambrose's statement was questionable (Harvey). John Siebert and Kenneth Epps of Project Ploughshares promptly pointed out the erroneous nature of Minster Ambrose's statement in their report. Project Ploughshares is

a non-governmental organization affiliated with the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo. Siebert and Epps of Project Ploughshares made a presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence on September 15, 2010 questioning the government's rationale to acquire the F-35 Jets (Siebert and Epps August 2010). Project Ploughshares posed three main questions to the government with regard to the purchase of the F-35 JSF Jets, namely, the suitability of these jets to address the security threats and concerns raised by '*Canada First*', Canada's national defence strategy, the affordability of these jets, given that a service and maintenance contract had not been signed, and lastly the direct benefits of the JSF program to the Canadian taxpayer. Seibert and Epps express concerns over the interoperability, affordability, economic benefits and opportunity costs of this military acquisition (Epps, Why Joint Strike Fighter aircraft? Program cost rises and benefits carry risk; Epps, The Size of the F-35 Market is Overstated; Seibert, Canada's proposed Joint Strike Fighter purchase and the Canada First Defence Strategy). The questions posed by Seibert and Epps help shed light on the late capitalist ideologies at work behind the F-35 acquisition. The F-35 JSF aircraft required a new ecosystem of military equipment since it would not be interoperable with the existing suite of technologies. Acquiring the F-35 support system was not factored into the asset acquisition cost, the support system would be acquired through separate service and maintenance contracts which in this case had not been negotiated either. The sum total of all these costs rendered the F-35 aircraft an expensive military technology that offered economic benefits primarily for the Aerospace Industries.

On September 20, 2010 once the Parliament had reconvened after the summer break, it was Liberal MP Siobhan Coady who raised the question regarding the Conservative Party's in-

adherence to the rules of military procurement. Minister Ambrose answered the query by saying that there was an international competition already in place and the government did not want to jeopardize the opportunities for the Canadian aerospace industry. This response was rather problematic because the international competition Minister Ambrose mentions here was the US Department of Defence competition that took place between the Lockheed Martin X-35 and the Boeing X-32 aircrafts to select the builder of next generation JSF (Jorgenson). The Pentagon selected the Lockheed Martin X-35 team comprised of Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and BAE Systems for the engineering, development, manufacturing and production of the F-35 JSF Lightning II Jets (Nebinger; Aboulafia). Canada was not involved in this competition whatsoever. MP Coady's question was in regards to the Canadian military procurement process and how the government decided to go ahead with the purchase of the F-35 JSF without opening up the process to competitive bidding. When Ms. Siobhan Coady asked the Defence Minister when the open competition that he had promised took place and who made the decision to go ahead with the procurement, she was not given an answer. Instead the Defence Minister read from the Chief of the Air Staff Lieutenant-General André Deschamps written statement on the benefits of the F-35 Lightning II (Deschamps). This is an instance where the Minister evaded answering a direct question and offered a canned response that included statements from a 'Message Force Multiplier' instead (Dean). Jodi Dean refers to Army Personnel who are used by the government to communicate messages of military significance as 'Message Force Multipliers' (Dean, Affective Networks 25).

On September 21, 2010 the new Liberal Defence Critic Dominic LeBlanc furthered probed the Defence Minister on the question of why the Conservative Government sidestepped

the competitive bidding process. Minister MacKay once again evaded the question. On September 23, 2010 Liberal MP Geoff Regan brought to the Speaker's attention how the Government was not compelled to purchase the F-35 jets under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that they had signed. MP Regan quoted former Defence Official Alan Williams statements to make his case. At this point Defence Minister MacKay refered to the Canadian involvement in the development stages of JSF program under the Liberal regime as proof of commitment. Peter MacKay misrepresented information here because the Canadian government's participation in the JSF program was not tethered to the purchase of the jets. This is another instance where the Defence Minister avoided answering the question in regards to the rationale for choosing to acquire the F-35 jets, and instead offered a duplicitous response.

On September 29, 2010 the Liberal Defence Critic Dominic LeBlanc posed the question if Canada could defer its purchase of the F-35 aircrafts like other JSF partner nations had chosen to do. LeBlanc mentions how the high cost of acquisition had let JSF member nations including Netherlands, Norway, UK and the US to reduce the quantity of aircrafts being ordered. Industry Minister Tony Clement's response was centered around the benefits that the Canadian Aeronautical Industry were to receive from this timely purchase. Minister Clement went on to read a statement from the Aerospace Industries Association of Canada (AIAC) President Dr. Claude Lajeunesse and referred to MP LeBlanc's statement as a 'political game'. This is another instance where the government official chose to read from a statement from a 'Message Force Multiplier' rather than answering the question to the best of his/her abilities. This technique of hiding behind a prepared statement from an authority figure does little if anything to promote civility in parliamentary deliberations. It is a stone-walling tactic used by the government

officials and employed to show how they tolerate the opposition's right to pose questions.

On October 6, 2010 the Liberal Defence Critic brought to the Speaker's attention how the Pentagon had decertified Lockheed Martin's F-35 Cost Tracking Program because of the company's inability to contain costs. LeBlanc expressed concern over the cost estimates put forth by the Conservative government. Since the US Department of Defence was undergoing a needs re-evaluation, Leblanc urged the Minister to do the same and engage in an open and transparent competition to acquire the air force equipment. Minister MacKay responded to the question by saying that it was a good thing that Lockheed Martin's cost tracking program no longer be subject to government regulations and went on to read a quote from Lieutenant General Deschamps about the virtues of F-35 Lightning II. In this instance Minister MacKay sidestepped the issue brought up for discussion by MP LeBlanc; which was the cost escalations experienced by the JSF program. The Defence Minister evaded the question from the opposition regarding the lack of economic transparency that was prevalent in the largest military acquisition to date. Instead MacKay chose to answer the question by reading a prepared statement which quoted a senior armed forces official. Such statements were supposed to legitimize the military's need and rationalize the Department of Defence's decision to the purchase of the F-35 Jets. This exchange between the Defence Minister and the Liberal Defence critic highlights how the Minister had entrenched himself in partisan rhetoric and was not willing to respond to the opposition's on the lack of openness and transparency in the acquisition process. It is important to note that in the months leading up to the F-35 acquisition Minister MacKay has assured the opposition MPs that the fighter jet acquisition process would be an open competitive process.

NDP Defence Critic Jack Harris referenced former Assistant Deputy Minister, Alan Williams' testimony to the Standing Committee on National Defence on October 7, 2010 where Williams' had condemned the non-competitive $16 billion deal that the government had signed (LeBlanc) during Question Period on October 8, 2010. Harris said that according to Williams' testimony participating in the JSF program did not prevent competition, so the government was intentionally misleading the people by stating otherwise. Harris asked why was it that the government had not released a statement of needs that documented the military's requirements. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Laurie Hawn responded to the query by citing the industrial benefits that Canada gains from participating in the JSF program. Hawn said that the F-35 JSF Lightning II jet was the only fifth generation aircraft that met the needs of the military. Hawn did not answer any of the questions raised by the opposition defence critic. By not citing the military needs and only referring to the industrial benefits arising from the procurement of the F-35 MP Hawn's political discourse reveals the ideological paradigm at play here. MP Laurie Hawn's response infers that the needs of the needs of Department of Defence are in tandem with those of the military-industrial complex.

When asked by the Liberal Defence Critic Dominic LeBlanc on October 18, 2010, "What proof does the government have that the F-35 provides the lowest cost at the best value to Canadian taxpayers when even the Pentagon thinks the costs are out of control? Why will the government not make any of this information public?" Defence Minister Peter MacKay responded by saying,

> "Mr. Speaker, that was a fact-free question. This process goes back many years. It goes back to a time when the member opposite was, wait for it, the parliamentary secretary to the minister of defence. In 2003, he had this to say: 'Our cooperation with the United States, for example on joint strike fighters has earned Canadian companies substantial

> industrial benefits.' At that time he was for the process and wanted to replace the aircraft. Now he has changed his position. We will not play politics on the backs of the military."

Minister MacKay's response chose to ignore the substance of MP LeBlanc's question. As clear and unambiguous as MP LeBlanc's question was, the Defence Minister's repose was unclear and his use of the phrase 'fact-free question' was in fact nonsensical. MP LeBlanc posed a question of fact; either the government could prove that the F-35 offered the best value for the lowest cost or it could not prove it; either the government could make the total cost acquisition data available to the public or it would not. Both of MP LeBlanc's questions could be answered by Minister MacKay referencing facts or evidence. This statement by Minister MacKay is important to understand how the obfuscation process works in the political discourse of Question Period. On May 27, 2010, Defence Minister Peter MacKay had mentioned that only an aircraft with the best value would be selected through an open competitive bidding process. Yet in his responses on October 18, 2010, Minister MacKay does not refer to cost estimates or budget documents that would clarify MP LeBlanc's questions. The Defence Minister engaged in political posturing and provided details that serve as an example 'explicitness without understanding' (Taylor). Defence Minister MacKay rather than providing answers to the opposition's queries chose to use patriotic rhetoric instead when he said, "play politics on the backs of the military"; in this case it was Minister MacKay himself who was playing politics.

When MP Geoff Regan posed the follow up question, "Why not hold an open competition so we can get the best plane for the best price?" Peter MacKay chose to respond by reading a quote from the Chief of the Air Staff, André Deschamps. The manner in which the Defence Minister repeatedly dodged the question is troubling. The opposition's efforts to hold

the government accountable to their actions was met with posturing tactics, mis-information and vacuous commentary. The parliamentary discourse that was taking place with respect to the issue of the F-35 jet acquisition brought to light how corporate interests were shaping the discursive paradigm. The government was repeatedly misrepresenting the state of affairs, most grievous of which was the nature of the competition and the cost of acquisition.

On October 20, 2010 when Liberal MP Geoff Regan questioned why the Defence Minister had promised an open, transparent, competition only to scoff at the process by going ahead with the purchase order. In response, Defence Minister MacKay repeated the detailed of the US led competition. By citing the US competition and refuting his own claim the Minister misrepresented the situation. The Defence Minister was well aware that the opposition members of parliament were asking why a Canadian competition did not take place to select the best aircraft for the Canadian air force yet the government executives incessantly refer to the Pentagon-led competition to select the manufacturer of the JSF aircraft. This was a deliberate ploy on the government’s part to mislead and deceive the opposition party members of parliament.

On October 27, 2010 Conservative MP Peter Braid praised the economic and industrial benefits that were accrued from the Canadian Forces participating in the F-35 Program. Conservative MP Sylvie Boucher complimented this premise in her statement by citing the millions of dollars in investment the research and development laboratories have brought to Canadian corporations and universities. Braid also criticized the Liberal opposition's point of view saying the Liberals were playing political games and promising to cancel the plan

jeopardized Canadian industry and jobs. This is another example of the Conservative government using the ‘shock and awe’ tactic. By painting the Liberal claims in terms of economic insecurity and unemployment they were effectively stoking the people’s fears. Since people live ‘chrono-economically stressed’ lives the Liberal opposition leader’s claim that military equipment acquisition protocols had not been followed by the Conservative government fell on deaf ears. Prime Minister Harper framed his response to highlight how replacing the existing flight CF-18s with the F-35s was the patriotic thing to do since it would ensure the safety of armed forces personnel and the economically right thing to do since it was good for the industry leaders and working people. The rhetorical core of the conservative message revolved around how the F-35 acquisition would fire up the economic engine of the country.

Liberal Defence Critic Dominic LeBlanc brought to the Defence Minister’s attention how the government had not defined the operational requirements for the F-35 purchase. LeBlanc also pointed out that the government did not take into account the aircraft service and maintenance costs. He mentioned how four JSF partner nations had already cancelled their orders or reduced the fleet size. Under these circumstances the F-35 costs were spiralling out of control. Minister MacKay responded by referring to MP Leblanc’s statements by saying, “I think the Leader of the Opposition is having an Ebenezer Scrooge moment. We are seeing echoes of Liberal cancellations past”. Defence Minister MacKay once again refused to address the questions posed by the opposition.

Liberal MP Ralph Goodale posed the question in Question Period on October 28, 2010 as to why the Conservative Government was ignoring Auditor General Sheila Fraser’s report. The

Auditor General's report listed the reasons for the Chinook Military helicopter fiasco: a sole-sourced, untendered, non-competitive process. The F-35 acquisition was also plagued by the same procedural flaws. Goodale asked why the government was not listening to the Auditor General's report and engaged in a risky financial acquisition. Prime Minister Harper's response to MP Ralph Goodale was that the Liberal party was playing politics with this issue and the government had no intention of engaging in such antics. By offering such a response, Prime Minister Harper sidestepped the question and chose to ignore its premise.

Defence Critic LeBlanc listed the Former Assistant Defence Minister Alan Williams testimony, the Auditor General's report, the Pentagon report and the UK Conservatives report, as providing ample evidence to why the F-35 JSF purchase was not a responsible use of taxpayer money. The Defence Minister response to this was, "Why do they [Liberal Opposition] continually oppose efforts to build up the Canadian Forces so they can do the important work that we ask of them?" Not only did MacKay choose not to give any credence to LeBlanc's query and the reports mentioned in his query he chose to frame it as a political spat. MacKay's actions are an example of what Slavoj Žižek refers to as the 'culturalization of politics' (Žižek 2008: 660). By choosing to ignore the social, economic and political problems illustrated by LeBlanc and focusing on LeBlanc's politico-cultural otherness, MacKay was able to displace the MP's communication into the cultural domain. In the process genuine political difference is turned into cultural difference; cultural differences are non-negotiable.

On November 18, 2010 when MP LeBlanc specifically asked the question, "Why will the Conservatives not do the right thing and have an open Canadian competition?" Minister of

Industry, Tony Clement replied, "[T]he hon. member has a short and selective memory. It was his government that had the competition on the F-35 and at the time the hon. member was all in favour of it. He was praising the F-35 choice." MP Clement chose to ignore the premise of the question: the 'Canadian competition', the disavowal of policies and procedures put in place to maintain transparency and accountability of government purchases. Minister Clement chose to inject partisan rhetoric into the response and reroute the discussion into pedestrian partisan disagreements.

On March 10, 2011 the day after the Speaker had ruled that the government reveal the total cost of the F-35 JSF aircraft acquisition to the Canadian people. Liberal Opposition leader Michael Ignatieff posed the question, “When will the government stop lowballing the cost to the Canadian public, face the facts and tell them the truth?” The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, MP John Baird did not acknowledge the question from the opposition, rather went on to speak about the safety and well-being of the men and women of the Canadian armed forces. Baird said that the armed forces required newer equipment and it was the government's responsibility to provide it to them. Liberal Defence Critic Dominic LeBlanc followed up by quoting the Parliamentary Budget Office report which stated that the government estimates of the F-35 cost were incorrect and that the actual cost would be over twice the amount originally estimated by the Conservative government. MP Hawn responded to this query by saying that the PBO's report was merely a “preliminary set of data for discussion”. This was an effort on the part of MP Laurie Hawn to try to devalue the serious allegation raised by the Liberals with quantifiable evidence from the parliamentary budget office. When NDP Defence critic Jack Harris posed the question in parliament, “How can the government be trusted when it

is not telling Canadians the truth about the real cost of these jets?" MP Hawn said in response that the PBO reporting methodologies were not congruent with the methodologies adopted by the Department of Defence. He said that the PBO report was not reliable because the figures used were merely estimates whereas the Department of Defence figures were exact and therefore much more precise. In this process MP Hawn tried to dismantle the credibility of the PBO report. The fact remains that the PBO data is available for all Canadians to see and the methods by which these estimates were obtained are all also freely available, the same cannot be said about the Department of Defence cost estimates. MP Hawn's actions are an example of how he was attempting to confuse the public with a different set of calculations, facts and figures, thereby trying to leverage their chrono-economic stress to his benefit. MP Hawn's statements create the impression that the Department of Defence is a patriotic institution that is infallible whereas the Parliamentary Budget Office is merely a functioning unit of a government bureaucracy.

Interpreting the Media Discourse around the F-35 aircraft acquisition

The cultural ramifications of incivil political discourse become all the more evident in media depictions; therefore, it is important to analyze the F-35 acquisition narrative from an independent media avenue. The Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC) is a not for profit television service that provides an autonomous editorial voice on Parliament, politics and Canadian public affairs. Scott Taylor's CPAC Documentary *F-35: The Politics of Procurement* provides a broad overview of the Canadian Department of Defence's military procurement strategy with regards to the F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter Jets (F-35 Jets) as well as offering interviews with military personnel, members of parliament and various other military analysts who weigh-in on the nature of this military acquisition, and how the issue was framed in

the media and its implication for the public. The documentary *F-35: The Politics of Procurement* is instrumental in highlighting the secretive nature of government's F-35 Lightning II JSF Aircraft procurement. Former Assistant Defence Minister Alan Williams refers to the F-35 procurement as "twisted and manipulated". The F-35 aircrafts and the suite of industry benefits that it brings to Canadian Aeronautics Industry is touted as one of the significant reasons why the Conservative Government went ahead with this military acquisition. A critical analysis of why this aspect of the message was placed front and centre of the communication efforts of the Harper government reveals the duplicitous and incivil nature of some mediatized political discourse.

Taylor starts off the documentary by shedding light on how it was that the F-35 JSF acquisition had come hot off the heels of a C$2.6 billion mid-life upgrade to the existing fleet of CF-18 Hornets. On May 27, 2010 NDP Defence Critic Jack Harris posed a question in the House of Commons in regards to the life expectancy of the refurbished and modernized CF-18 Hornets; and it they were going to be replaced by a new fleet of aircrafts in the near future. To this question Defence Minister Peter MacKay stated on the record at the time that there would be an open competitive transparent process to replace the F-18 Hornets with a next-generation fighter. Two months after this parliamentary deliberation the Defence Minister announced the F-35 JSF procurement plan. In Scott Taylor's interview with Jack Harris, Harris mentions how the Defence Minister retcons[2] the public competition process back to 2001. This is an example of how the term competitive process is used duplicitously. The competition the Defence Minister is

[2] Coined by Damian Cugley, 'retcon' is the shortened verb version of "retroactive continuity". Retcon refers to the alteration of previously established facts in a plotline to accommodate the present plotline, most usually used in comicbook literature. "Original meaning of RETroactive CONtinuity" at rec.arts.comics; Google Groups; Accessed July 20, 2011.

referring to here is the US Department of Defence competition to select the manufacturing contractor to build the JSF aircraft. The competition NDP Defence Critic Jack Harris was referring to was the open acquisition process the Canadian Forces adopts to buy new military equipment. The Defence Minister capitalized on the media sound bite culture and the chrono-economic stress (Ouellette) that the audience receiving this information was under. By referring to the US competition process as the public competition process and stating that Canadian participation in the F-35 program happened under Liberal stewardship, the opposition cannot blame the government for their actions. In this process the retcon goes through without much public scrutiny.

An analysis the operational constitution of the 1996-2001 stage of the JSF program, the stage Hee Sung Moon defines as the 'Concept Demonstration Phase' (Moon 18) suggests that operating partners were not expected to be fully committed as consumers of the technology. In 2006, the JSF program was run by the JSF Program Office led by the Lockheed Martin comprised of Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems and Northrop Grumman which Moon defined as an 'International Aerospace Enterprise' funded by the US Department of Defence, the UK Government and eight other partner nations including Canada (Moon 24). Being a funding partner in this international aerospace enterprise did not compel Canada into purchasing this F-35 JSF aircraft as the Defence Minister's discourse alluded to. Jack Harris refers to Minister MacKay's F-35 announcement as a 'total sham' because the competition was made by the Americans; and Canadians were merely onlookers with no decision-making power in the process. Liberal Defence Critic Dominic LeBlanc noted how in 1997 the Jean Chrétien Government took up a mid-level position in the development of a next-generation aircraft by

participating in the JSF program. This participation has been economically fruitful to the Canadian Aeronautics Industry. LeBlanc reiterated that participation in and of itself did not pare down the selection process, by participating in the research and development of the F-35 JSF aircraft, Canada was not under economic duress to select the F-35 jet through a sole-sourced non-competitive process, when upgrading its fleet of fighter jets. Scott Taylor interviewed Former Assistant Defence Minister Alan Williams, under whose leadership it was that Canada entered the F-35 JSF Program. Participation in the JSF program came in the form of C$150 million investment. This investment by the Canadian Department of National Defence and Industry Canada assured that Canadian Aeronautics Industry could bid on any future contracts that would arise from the JSF project. Canada's participation in the project was primarily to benefit the Aeronautics Industry and it was not embarked upon with an eye towards acquisition of these military assets. Williams stressed that the requirements for the JSF aircraft were set by the US Department of Defence. However, the Conservative Government MPs and their 'Message Force Multipliers' used the media to cement the idea that the F-35 aircraft met the needs requirements of the Canadian Armed Forces (Dean). Williams opines that to suggest that those American requirements meet Canada's national defence needs and requirements is perpetuating falsehood and is unconscionable.

The documentary noted how after the announcement to acquire the F-35 JSF fleet was made in July 2010, the Harper Government set forth on an aggressive media and public relations campaign to sell this project and its promised benefits to the Canadian people. This media blitzkrieg by the Conservative government clearly demonstrates how 'Money/Speech over-determination' functions within the domain of 'Communicative Capitalism' (Greene, Dean). On

the Prime Minister's annual Arctic tour of Resolute Bay, Northwest Territories on August 25, 2010, he praised the CF-18 Hornets rapid response which ensured that Russian Tupolev TU-95 bombers did not enter Canadian sovereign airspace. John Ibbitson describes the Prime Minister's actions as "beautifully staged act of geopolitical theatre (Ibbiston 2010)." Prime Minister Harper incorporated 'shock and awe' tactics into his message. He shocks the public by raising the spectre of a possible Russian attack and awes them with information about Canada's new military acquisition the stealth-enabled F-35 aircraft. The Conservative government mobilizes its communication campaign to capitalize on the semiotics baggage of this incident (Galloway, PMO launches pre-emptive strike against fighter-jet critics). Lieutenant-General André Deschamps, the Chief of Air Staff performed the Message Force Multiplier role, silencing critics of the government's decision to acquire the F-35 JSF aircrafts through an exclusive interview with The Globe and Mail (Clark). Deschamps extols the virtues of stealth technology and establishes the rationale why Canadian Forces must have this technology. He says, "If they [the Russians] can't detect us and don't know where we are, it dramatically changes their potential tactics. So it is a deterrent (Clark)." By echoing the Prime Minister's claim from the previous week about a possible Russian incursion and tacking on to that message the virtues of Stealth capabilities, the Chief of Air Staff tries to build a case for the purchase of the F-35 Jets, these actions suggest the workings of a well-oiled media relations campaign (Galloway, PMO launches pre-emptive strike against fighter-jet critics). The media narrative by the Prime Minister and the Lieutenant-General taken in tandem suggest that it is the responsibility of the government to upgrade its military arsenal to ensure that Canadian sovereignty is not under attack.

However upon critically analyzing the Prime Minister's claims of a possible Russian incursion it becomes rather obvious that such a scenario is highly unlikely. Steve Staples of the Rideau Institute writes that according to North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) there is no military challenge in the Arctic (CPAC Special). Liberal Defence Critic Dominic LeBlanc mentions in his interview with Scott Taylor how Russian and Canadian Forces routinely engage in Joint Air force and Naval exercises in the Arctic waters (CPAC Special). Dr. Philippe Lagassé, defence analyst at the University of Ottawa opines that if at all Russia were to send a fleet of aircrafts into Canadian airspace, the scenario would be such that Russia would have proclaimed nuclear war against the US (Ibbitson). If that were the case, the 65 F-35 Jets would not be of much use to protect sovereign Canadian airspace.

Scott Taylor points out another strategic manoeuvre employed by Prime Minister Harper's media blitzkrieg; to create public buy-in for the F-35 JSF aircraft acquisition. The communication campaign was built around the perceived benefits to the Canadian Aeronautical Industry and the high paying jobs that would flow from purchasing these jets. Dr. Claude Lajeunesse, President & CEO of Aerospace Industries Association of Canada (AIAC) was very vocal in his lobbying efforts to pressure MPs to vote in favour of the F-35 JSF acquisition (Harvey, Aerospace Industry Leaders Affirm Support for F-35 Purchase). The Aerospace Industries Association of Canada (AIAC) press release states that the Canadian Aeronautics Industry employ approximately 80,000 people across 400 companies while generating C$22 billion of revenue annually (Walker). Dr. Claude Lajeunesse, former President of Concordia University and Ryerson University, functioned as a message force multiplier connecting the industry to academia as well. Concordia University's Institute of Aerospace Design &

Innovation (IADA) houses projects sponsored by Esterline CMC Electronics Project and Pratt & Whitney Canada, companies with subcontracts to manufacture parts and equipment for the Lockheed Martin F-35 JSF aircraft (Pole 12; German).

Tom Burbage, General Manager, F-35 Program, Lockheed Martin served as the industrial message force multiplier highlighting the benefits of the F-35 acquisition to the Canadian Aerospace Industry and the high paying jobs that would flow from it. Burbage tells Taylor that Canadian aeronautical companies have secured contracts for approximately C$320 million on the F-35 aircraft already (CPAC Special). And Burbage also notes that as the F-35 JSF manufacturing processes mature, Canada's aeronautical industry revenue stream will reach a steady-state of C$12 Billion. The Aerospace Industries Association of Canada (AIAC) media juggernaut included a panel presentation from Presidents and CEOs of Canadian Aviation Electronics CAE Inc., Esterline CMC Electronics and Avecorp as well (Harvey; Hudon; Matthews; Van Rooij). The Aerospace Industry titans from Héroux-Devtek, Aéro Montréal, Magellan Aerospace and Avecorp showered the government with illustrious praise on their decision to acquire the F-35 Jets. At the joint-media event hosted by AIAC, captains of the Canadian aerospace industry highlighted the high paying jobs, technology transfer, research and development opportunities, economic benefits that would come out of the government's plan to acquire the F-35 JSF aircrafts (Harvey; Hudon; Matthews; Van Rooij). This media spectacle highlights how 'Money/Speech Over-determination' operates within the mediascape (Greene). The AIAC's communicative labour garnered media attention to highlight the economic benefits package that would come with the F-35 JSF military procurement and emphasize the importance of the aerospace industry to the Canadian peoples.

The Military Personnel taking on the role of the Message Force Multiplier in the CPAC Documentary *F-35: The Politics of Procurement* is retired General Paul Manson. Apart from having served as Chief of the Defence Staff from 1986 to 1989, Manson was a former Chairman of Lockheed Martin Canada from 1996 - 1997. Manson rationalizes the need for the Canadian Forces to acquire the F-35 jet citing how the aircraft would act as a deterrent when the Canadian Forces conduct expeditionary operations (CPAC Special). This was another example of playing up the idea of a bogeyman who would possibly encroach into sovereign Canadian territories, a media tactic used to rile up the public. The Government's use of 'Message Force Multipliers' to reinforce their decision to acquire the F-35 JSF aircrafts was a direct assault on the communicative agency of civilians in political opposition. As NDP Defence Critic Jack Harris mentions 'it takes away civilian role of oversight of military expenditures (Taylor 2011).'

Harper's media campaign worked in tandem with the industry lobby group to reinforce the message of how good the F-35 JSF aircrafts would be for the people. The Prime Minister spoke to workers at the Bell Helicopter Textron Canada Ltd. factory in Mirabel, Quebec on January 14, 2011. At the event Prime Minister Harper echoed Lockheed Martin F-35 Program Manager Burbage's estimate of the C$12 Billion in revenues that would be generated by the Canadian aeronautical industry once the F-35 deal goes through (Montpetit). Liberal Industry critic Marc Garneau dismissed the C$12-billion estimated figure as "pure fantasy" (PostMedia News). Marc Garnaeu said that the estimate was predicated on the peak output performance of 5000 aircrafts being manufactured; but given the present economic climate, several JSF partner nations had scaled back their purchase orders, negatively impacting the manufacturing base,

raising purchase order estimates and driving down outputs to around 3000 aircrafts (PostMedia News). Garneau questioned how the statement of requirements for this military acquisition came into being. MP Garneu said that the Department of National Defence and the Government of Canada drafted the statement of requirements to acquire the aircraft in 2010 after they had decided that they were going to purchase the F-35 Lightning II aircraft (CPAC Special).

Former Defence Minister Alan Williams concurred with Garnaeu's assessment calling it a "perversion of the system" (CPAC Special). Michael Sullivan, Director of Acquisition and Sourcing Management for the United States Government Accountability Office reported that after nine years in the development stage and going into its fifth year of production, the JSF Program is yet to demonstrate a stable design and mature manufacturing process; software development, simulation tests, lab results, flight tests have all been over budget and behind schedule (Sullivan, JSF Accelerating Procurement before Completing Development Increases the Government's Financial Risk) (Sullivan, JSF Restructuring Places Program on Firmer Footing, but Progress Is Still Lagging 8-11). Given the operational inefficiencies plaguing the JSF program, including cost over-runs and extended schedules, the acquisition cost of the F-35 aircrafts continue to rise (Sullivan, JSF Restructuring Places Program on Firmer Footing, but Progress Is Still Lagging 15). At which point the perceived economic benefits of the program do not translate well to the tax-paying public. Another point of contention that MP Garnaeu raised was that given the economic climate of the US, most manufacturing sector jobs coming out of the F-35 JSF program would first and foremost be fielded by American companies and only after that would the Canadians be considered (PostMedia News). Steve Staples of the Rideau Institute argued that when government takes cues from the Canadian Aeronautics Industry CEOs on

decisions about military aircraft procurement, the market imperative clouds their better judgement (CPAC Special).

Former Defence Minister Alan Williams also makes the point that the primary criteria for buying military equipment should be because the equipment meets the needs requirement of the military and not because of the size of the industrial benefit package. Williams also says that by not going into a competition, we are worse off because only an open, competitive bidding process would reveal if the F-35 was the best available package. This is an important point to be noted because in parliamentary deliberations about the F-35 procurement the Conservative government inferred that the F-35 JSF aircraft was selected as it was the only aircraft that met the needs and requirements of the airforce. But this revelation suggests that it was the military-industry leaders who were propelling the acquisition process forward. The domain of 'communicative capitalism' enabled the military-industrial complex to acquire lucrative F-35 defence contract. The public-relations campaigns highlighted the economic prosperity and job opportunities that would be bestowed own the people as and when the political establishment green lit the procurement process.

Scott Taylor also interviewed Winslow Wheeler, Senior Analyst at the Center for Defence Information in Washington, DC. a strong critic of the F-35 program who provided testimony before the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence (SCND) in the documentary. Wheeler elucidates the Conservative government's rationale to acquire the F-35 JSF military technology, a product of the globalizing military-industrial complex and 'maleovalent trends' in political engineering. The various military components that make up the

F-35 JSF aircraft are manufactured throughout the nation. The manufacturing processes are distributed across several political ridings. Politicians clamour to locate these military industries and the resulting 'high paying jobs' in their ridings. In this manner, the neo-liberal paradigm of connecting network topologies is embedded into the conception of the Joint Strike Fighter Program. Neoliberal governance is a way of thinking that stems from distinct but connected technologies working within changing aspects of economic competition. When politicians speak of the economic benefits that arise from the JSF program, they are in effect creating those sound bite ready clips that are most likely to get them re-elected. Built in to the concept and design of the F-35 aircraft was its global sourcing and supplying of parts and services. By incorporating what military aviation analyst Craig Caffrey calls ‘interoperable technologies’ the JSF fosters a shared platform among allied forces (Neild). With a global supply chain of design and production facilities and military research and development sites, spread across JSF partner nations, the program has created an interconnected network of military allies who are both producers and consumers of the aircraft. The size and scope of the F-35 JSF Project defines the prowess of the global military-industrial complex under neo-liberalism. In his testimony to Canada’s House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence (SCND) on January 21, 2011 Winslow Wheeler raised three questions; How much will Canada pay for the JSF fighter acquisition; what is the return on investment; and what is Canada’s rationale for putting in this hasty purchase order. Wheeler's questions help clarify the rationale for Conservative government's acquisition of the F-35 aircraft. The military acquisition was communicated to the conservative political base as an avenue for guaranteed high paying jobs. The chrono-economically stressed public received this information through their media filter bubbles that emphasized the aspects of economic stability and patriotism. In this process the Conservative

parliamentarians perfectly align themselves with Ronald Walter Greene's idea of the politician being an amalgam of "communicative labour, money/speech and neo-liberal governance (Greene, Rhetorical Capital: Communicative Labor, Money/Speech, and Neo-Liberal Governance 328)".

The decision by the Conservative Government to go ahead with Lockheed Martin as the sole-vendor for the procurement of the F-35 JSF aircrafts was the point of contention raised by the opposition. Liberal Defence Critic Ujjal Dosanjh pointed out in Question Period that by not undertaking a competitive bidding process involving other potential bidders and procurement experts, the Canadian tax-payer could not be assured this procurement contract was the best deal available to the government (Garneau). Dosanjh contacted the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) and requested for a report to be prepared that would indicate the financial footprint of the F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter acquisition. The PBO unveiled the report on March 10, 2011. The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) report to the House of Commons produced some staggering variances in the cost per aircraft. The cost of acquisition estimate as put forth by the Department of Defence was C$75 Million per plane while the cost of acquisition as estimated by the PBO was between C$148 and C$168 Million per plane (CPAC Special). The Conservative Government's attempt at rationalizing their decision to purchase the jets included Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Defence Laurie Hawn suggesting that the Parliamentary Budget Officer's computational methodology was flawed and therefore the report was not reliable or trustworthy. Laurie Hawn also explained that since the United States Government Accountability Office (US GAO) cost estimate was based on an average cost of the three F-35 variant models that were being produced; the US GAO estimate could not be used as a referent. Moreover,

Hawn says that US GAO cost estimate averaged the price of the aircraft over the tenure of the program. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Defence rationalized to the media that the methodology used by the US GAO and the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) skewed the average price since the manufacturing costs were higher in the initial periods (Payton). To discredit the cost estimation methodology used by the PBO the Conservative Government turned to Assistant Deputy Minister (Material), Department of Defence, Dan Ross to come up with an alternate estimate which would be congruent with the government estimates (Geddes). The cost estimates that were made by the Parliamentary Budget Office were well in line with those released by the United States Government Accountability Office yet Prime Minister Harper chose to ignore these estimates when addressed the opposition MPs in Question Period. The conservative government's various attempts at trying to discredit the PBO report in the Question Period deliberations and media reportage serve as examples of how they were creating smokescreens and complications, making the information unintelligible to the public. These discursive practices were a deliberate ploy to mislead the opposition MPs and by and large the public as well.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper said in media interviews that Canada would receive the F-35 aircrafts at a low price point and they would be within the cost estimates put forth by the Department of National Defence (Chase). Winslow Wheeler raised a valid counter argument to Harper's assurance about the price point guarantee; Wheeler says that Canada had not signed a contract with the JSF Program; all that existed was a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The MoU guarantees a benefit to all JSF partner nations who are given a rebate on the development cost of the airplane (CPAC Special). It is worth noting Lockheed Martin F-35

Program, General Manager, Tom Burbage's statement about the JSF costing model; according to Burbage the JSF costing model stipulates that the F-35 aircraft cannot be sold to JSF partner nations at a price lower than the price at which the US Department of Defence acquires it. Seeing that the JSF partner price point is aligned with the US price point, the cost of the aircraft is more in-line with the estimate put forth by the US GAO and the PBO and not the price as estimated by Assistant Deputy Minister (Material), Department of Defence, Dan Ross. Burbage's statement delegitimizes Prime Minister Harper's claims about the low price at which Canadian acquisition would take place. According to Former Defence Minister Alan Williams any claims made by the Government which state that the F-35A CTOL Lightning II aircraft is the best aircraft at the best price are false and untrue; because being in development the aircraft has not undergone rigorous field testing and being behind schedule the costs have escalated as well (Taylor 2011). Upon critically analyzing the various media sources it becomes clear that Prime Minister Harper's promise of the low price point is in fact a fabrication.

Scott Taylor points out in the documentary, *F-35: The Politics of Procurement*, how the Defence Minister Peter Mackay, Former Chief of Defence Staff, retired General Paul Manson, MP Laurie Hawn and various other government officials repeatedly state that the F-35 JSF aircraft is the only 'Fifth Generation Fighter' that is available to Canada and meets Canada's air force needs. Unlike the term '4.5 generation fighter aircraft' which is defined by Military Aviation Specialists (Gertler) the term 'fifth generation fighters' is trademarked by the Lockheed Martin Corporation (United States Patents and Trademark Office Serial Number: 78885922). By repeatedly using the term 'fifth generation fighters' in the parliamentary discussions, press releases and media interviews these government officials have genericized the term. Therefore,

government officials' use of the genericized trademark shows the pervasive power of 'communicative capitalism' (Dean, Communicative capitalism: circulation and the foreclosure of politics 54). As Dean describes it we are witnessing,"[T]he proliferation of the very tools of democracy coincide with the collapse of democratic deliberation (Dean, Communicative capitalism: circulation and the foreclosure of politics 54)." Winslow Wheeler's says that Lockheed Martin uses the term 'fifth generation fighter' to paint the aura of a super-weapon around its aircraft, it is a buzzword used by defence contractors to sell the weapon.

When Government officials parrot buzzword-ridden statements in Question Period, their 'communicative actions' are not being received and understood, rather they are circulated through the 'communicative media network' (Dean, Communicative capitalism: circulation and the foreclosure of politics 56). In the process, Question Period becomes a venue for MPs to engage as 'interpassive subjects' (Žižek, How to Read Lacan), opposition MPs believe that they are holding the government accountable by posing their questions and questioning the government's actions. But it is merely a false activity because of the parliamentarians failure to come together to produce deliberations of political consequence. Incivility in political discourse resides in the MPs inability to engage in fruitful debates, where purposeful questions are posed and legitimate responses are provided network' (Dean, Communicative capitalism: circulation and the foreclosure of politics 60). Every attempt made by the opposition MPs to question the rationale for selecting the sole-sourcing option to replace the existing fleet of aircrafts was swiftly met by capitalist market logic: the industrial benefits package, transnational contracts accessible to Canadian Industry (Harvey, Aerospace Industry Association urges MPs to vote against F-35 motion and stand up for jobs and growth).

The Conservative government communication strategy also thwarted the opposition's claim to uphold a fair and open military acquisition process by labelling it as their attempt to create controversy and politicize the acquisition process. When the opposition questioned the military need for the Canadian Forces to acquire the F-35 JSF aircrafts, the government rolled out Defence personnel who expressed the unequivocal need for the Canadian Air Force to be equipped with stealth technology, the 'fifth generation aircraft' was the only one that met the needs requirements of the Air Force. Rideau Institute Director, Steve Staples points to the flaw in this argument, he says the Canada First Defence Strategy does not require of the nation to have high-end first strike capable stealth fighters to defend and control North American airspace (Staples). The Canadian Armed Forces primarily function as a Peace Keeping Force; the military requirements of the nation must be dictated by those policies (CPAC Special). Staples argues that the F-35 JSF aircraft does not provide any comparable benefits to the Canadian Air Force besides 'shock and awe' capabilities (CPAC Special). Staples concludes by saying that, for a country that has only deployed its fighter jets twice in the past 30 years, Canada's small fleet of JSF aircrafts will not be of much benefit to an allied force in an expeditionary mission either (Staples 2010).

Interpreting Communicative Capitalism: Who is the Government Hooker?

As political discourse gets interpellated into 'communicative capitalism', I propose adopting pop musician Lady Gaga's phraseology 'Government Hooker' to critically explicate the discursive performance of some parliamentarians. Politicians articulated as 'Government Hookers' readily demonstrate how the scopophilic gaze of the mediascape renders their

parliamentary performance, as well as democratic deliberation's material interplay with contemporary information and entertainment networks (Dean, Affective Networks 21). The insolence and impertinence of political discourse comes from how political actors choose to obfuscate information for their ulterior motives. In so doing, the late-capitalist project to achieve socio-economic order is accomplished by political discourse. Since neo-liberal economies are knowledge-based, neo-liberal politics is discourse-driven (Fairclough 3). By piecing together various media texts, traversing the liminal spaces for what was left unsaid by the political actors, I ascertain that it is the omissions and obfuscations that politicians engage in that make political discourse incivil. The contemporary social, cultural and political practices that render the production of incivil political discourse can be understood by dwelling upon how political communicators operate within the terrain of 'Communication Capitalism' using 'Message Force Multipliers' to deliver their message payload (Dean, Affective Networks). Political Communicators load their messages with explicit detail such that the public do not comprehend it, this strategy is what Slavoj Žižek refers to as 'explicitness without understanding' (Žižek, The Ticklish Subject: the Absent Centre of Political Ontology, Second Edition). An example of such communication was the Conservative government's attempts at refuting the PBO cost estimate report. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Laurie Hawn's repudiation of the PBO report was incomprehensible, confusing, long-winded and complex, therefore the public receiving these messages were unable to comprehend it because they were 'chrono-economic stressed'(Millard 159). Critical discourse analysis captures the discursive capabilities of late capitalism suggesting that language wields significant power to affect the public through mediatized incivil political discourses.

Eli Parser (2011) rightly points out that it is a civic virtue to be subject to and aware of information outside your ideological comfort zone. Filter bubbles have created hyper-personalized information, limiting and controlling the public's textual engagement in the mediascape – the primary mode of contemporary political participation. Lazarsfeld and Katz's notion of opinion leadership as put forth in the 'two-step flow of communication'(1955) has been recalibrated in the era of search engine personalization (Wu et al. 2011). Opinion leadership and informational relevance is evaluated based on psychometrics, click-through rates, and other marketing research parameters. In order to preserve the sanctity of democratic institutions an informed citizenry is vitally important. Politics must connect with and be communicated to the public in order to gain their interest, involvement and most importantly their trust. In this respect, only information with all its liminal qualities forms the deliberative kernel of democratic discourse in the public sphere.

In reality news, media and information in general, in its late capitalist avatar is only purposeful in its reporting of metrics. Žižek's idea of the 'decline of symbolic efficiency' is evident in these articulations of information; the consumer is suspect of the content, favouring what can be enumerated (Žižek, The Ticklish Subject: the Absent Centre of Political Ontology, Second Edition). The book, music or film in and of itself does not project communicative value to the reader. Metrics create value for the public by functioning as 'message force multipliers' (Dean, Affective Networks 26). Information, in its metric form is not the message that must be received by the audience, rather metrics enable the core message to spread faster, across diverse media regimes, and with more intensity (Dean, Affective Networks 26).

In the case of the F-35 JSF aircrafts, the non-transparent sole-sourced military asset acquisition did not irk the public because of the number of high paying jobs that the JSF program promised. The ‘message force multipliers’ performative function was to transpose the informational cues from the military-industrial complex to the communicative capitalist mediascape. Media organizations retained the services of retired military personnel now acting as military analysts (subject matter experts) to provide commentary about military operations for the audience-public (Dean, Affective Networks 26). Similarly, ‘message force multipliers’ are found across the mediascape in similar performative functions as fashionistas, fitness trainers, decorators, political pundits, etc. ‘Message force multipliers’ add to the message’s ‘explicitness without understanding’, in turn increasing the public’s ‘chrono-economic stress’ (Dean; Taylor; Ouellette). Under these circumstances, the majority of viewers who are tuning into political news are actually tuning into a term I define as Political Porn. Political Porn is demonstrative of the exigencies of mediatized political discourse: reinforcing polarizing views and propagating in-civil political discourse; demarcating the onset of the decline in fact-based reporting, the increased reliance on political-punditry and the use of sensationalism to get the public attention in political news coverage (Sobieraj and Berry 2010).

Conclusion

The incivility of parliamentary discourse stems from how those in positions of power misrepresent facts to their fellow parliamentarians and the media. In the case of the F-35 JSF acquisition the total cost of acquisition was grossly misrepresented by the government. On March 9, 2011 the Speaker of the House of Commons found the government in contempt of Parliament for withholding information and misleading the parliament about the total cost of

acquisition of the F-35 JSF aircrafts. When opposition members of parliament posed questions to the government executives rather than providing answers, they evaded them and provided non-responses. This shows that those in power were merely tolerating the opposition's right to ask questions; they did not feel it was necessary to provide adequate responses to their questions. I find that the government officials' deliberate withdrawal from legitimate debate is where the incivility of parliamentary discourse lies. Incivility lies in the *sprezzatura* of the government officials responses; they are responses that suck the potential for democratic debate from the public sphere. The purpose of the government official's repose is to be replayed as mediatized sound bites. I find that this desire to be captured by the media morphs the political discourse into Political Porn. The public viewing the parliamentary proceedings are privy to the hyper-real tight-shots, but as they are mediatized and presented in sound bite format they are deprived of the institutional context. The Political Porn/mediatized political discourse becomes both explicit in depiction and lacking in symbolic content at the same time. In this process Political Porn's primary objective is made explicitly clear: revenue generation for the mediascape. In other words, Political Porn is a media-funded debasement of the public sphere. The socio-political implication of the public's repeated viewing of text that is chock-full of vacuous discourse is that they become indifferent to the content and in turn become politically disengaged citizenry (Norris).

The cultural and communicative power of political actors in the twenty-first century is determined by their capacity to cast and mould media discourse by the strategic use of social and political capital, to mobilize and influence public agendas (Habermas 415). Question Period has turned into a performance piece put on by some MPs for a cabal - media correspondents,

political staffers, and public servants. In this process, political discourse is performed in order to be mediatized rather than for the communicative purposes of a deliberative democracy. The media's sound bite coverage of QP proceedings is primarily motivated by the market dynamics of mass communication, to increase their viewership and is not directed at extolling the true value of QP: to allow open communication and to help set media, public and policy agendas. Media professionals act as interlocutors between civil society and the political centre. They derive their power from the capacity to pick and choose content; thereby creating an elite political communication discourse. Incivility as observed in political discourse can be characterized by the lack of communicative agency by those who endeavour to access and affect the media. The limited opportunities that communicators at the political institutional base have to leverage their political agenda creates an atmosphere wherein each and every turn of talk in QP is a desperate attempt about the message's amplification factor, the chances of having their speech act being picked up by the media institutions, and in turn, its potential to influence the public discourse.

The operational logic of QP is that politicians hope to affect the public perception and influence the public agenda, through pre-determined speech acts, which they hope will make its way into the public consciousness through the channels of mediated communication. The media institution will only give credence to those communicative acts that are likely to increase their viewership. If communicative acts are off-putting vituperative political discourse that delivers on that promise, civility takes the backseat. However, characterizing QP as incivil, takes away from it, the legitimacy of functioning as an integral part of the deliberative process in political communication and the public sphere. Civility and incivility are best understood as part and

parcel of the rhetorical and behavioral armory of politicians. In this hyper-communicative era, communicators - politicians, lobbyists and special interest groups tinker with both civility and incivility to shape and form political discourse. By pegging incivility as either destructive to, or a hindrance to democratic debate we are effectively appeasing the analytical paradigm without considering the symbiotic relationship that exists between politicians, public officials and the media.

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