

An exploration of the Fifth Estate landscape through film

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【Abstract】

Numerous films of late have been made about the whistleblower organization WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange, but perhaps the one which has the most applicability to the media studies or ESL/ESL class is *The Fifth Estate* (2013), an American biopic thriller that attempts to portray the impact Assange's organization has had on Washington, in particular the incumbent administration, as well as on Fourth Estate media agencies. The Fifth Estate is form of media that is most commonly associated with blogging, microblogging, and other types of media that operate beyond the realm of Fourth Estate, or mainstream news media. The Fifth Estate often finds itself at odds with the Fourth Estate, creating tension not only in global news media, but in global politics as well. It is my hope that this dichotomy can be felt and understood in the classroom as well. This paper serves two main functions: one is to offer a critical review of *The Fifth Estate*, the WikiLeaks film. The second is to offer selected salient points, written to initiate exploration and discussion in the media studies class, either in L1 or L2 contexts, on the topic of the Fifth Estate. Under scrutiny is the subject of transparency and Internet privacy and how the film treats these subjects, and how they can be explored by the reader and in the classroom.

【Keywords】 WikiLeaks, The Fifth Estate film, fifth estate journalism, fourth estate, media studies, EFL, ESL, global media, whistleblower, watchdog, Internet privacy, transparency, Julian Assange

1. Introduction

The Fifth Estate is form of media that is most commonly associated with blogging, microblogging, and other types of media that operate beyond the realm of Fourth Estate, or mainstream news media. The Fifth Estate often finds itself at odds with the Fourth Estate, creating tension not only in global news media, but in global politics as well. It is my hope that this dichotomy can be felt and understood in the classroom as well. This paper serves two main functions: one is to offer a critical review of the film *The Fifth Estate*, the WikiLeaks film. The second is to offer selected salient points, written to initiate exploration and discussion in the media studies class, either in L1 or L2 contexts, on the topic of the Fifth Estate. Under scrutiny is the subject of transparency and Internet privacy and how the film treats these subjects, and how they can be explored in the classroom.

The common English proverb *news travels fast* has been in use for over 400 years, yet never has news travelled faster than it does today. The broadcast medium known as microblogging is associated with the “Twitter Effect,” which is a term used to describe how Twitter use has accelerated the news cycle “to the point where news breaks every minute of every hour” (Ingram, 2011). News these days not only travels fast, it travels in realtime. And often it is ordinary people who are responsible for breaking today’s major stories, and, more often than not, in short, 140-character messages sent from their cellphones. In practical terms, anyone with access to the Internet has the potential to break news stories, anywhere, anytime. News

of the April 15, 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, for example, first broke on Twitter when a young minor league hockey player visiting Boston tweeted that he had heard explosions mere seconds after the bombs were detonated. According to recent statistics (Richter, 2013), Japan follows only the US in the number of prolific Twitter users; therefore, every day there is potential for a Japanese Twitter user to break a major news story.

In some cases, public reaction to certain news stories intensifies as more information is provided *by* the public in the form of firsthand knowledge, or even a leak. Some news stories get fuelled by such content, content which traditional news media outlets may sometimes be reluctant to report, or report in full. For example, in 2010, a Kobe Coast Guard Navigator by the name of Masaharu Isshiki sent an SD memory card to CNN, Japan. The card contained video footage of a maritime incident involving a Chinese trawler ramming a Japanese Coast Guard patrol boat while at sea in disputed waters near the Senkaku Islands. When CNN chose not air the footage, Isshiki made the decision to upload the video himself onto YouTube, and in so doing demonstrated that major news networks are not the only places one can turn to when seeking the full story. In fact, the Internet *is* the network more and more media consumers are turning to for their news, many eschewing newspapers, magazines, and even televised news. With the vast amount of transparency the Internet provides, even yesterday's news can be made new again in the sense that previously unreleased information has a way of resurfacing on the Internet. For example, video footage documenting the 1995 Monju Nuclear Plant accident was finally released on YouTube in 2008, 13 years after the incident by a group called News for the People Japan (NPJ). There are, however, laws in the making, or currently in effect that perhaps make today's journalists and citizen journalists alike think twice before blowing their whistle. On December 13, 2014, Japan's State Secrets Law will come into force, a law which states that "public offi-

cials and private citizens who leak 'special state secrets' face prison terms of up to 10 years, while journalists who seek to obtain the classified information could get up to five years" (McCurry, 2013). In my country, The United States, the US Department of Justice is looking to bring charges (under the Espionage Act of 1917) to whistleblower Edward Snowden for leaking NSA data in 2013. Ironically, Snowden has been nominated for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize. It perhaps goes without saying that the fast changing landscape of media and information technology is of great interest to many, and one in which each and every one of us plays an integral part. This paper invites teachers and students to survey the landscape of Fifth Estate media by inviting them to view and discuss the film of the same name, *The Fifth Estate*.

The Fifth Estate is a dramatic Hollywood thriller that tackles a timely topic in an entertaining way. This film is about the creation of the whistleblower organization WikiLeaks by its founder, Julian Assange and his colleague Daniel Domscheit-Berg, as well as the impact the organization has had on global media and politics. All told, there have been four mainstream films made either about Assange or WikiLeaks, or both; however, I feel that *The Fifth Estate* is the most appealing film on the subject, particularly for students at the tertiary level. It has all the hallmarks of a good thriller, yet one that has meaningful takeaways which help form talking points that will get students and teachers to think and talk long after the lesson ends as *Fifth Estate* media surely has a ubiquitous presence in all of our lives. The aforementioned talking points are outlined at the end of this report and serve as a resource for teachers wanting to discuss this film and/or the issues it raises.

2. Hollywood and whistleblower movies

Cinema in the United States has long served as society's mirror, one that reflects social trends and behaviors (Hill, Gibson, 1998). The motion picture industry draws from these as a source for scripts, stories that are ultimately retold (and sold back) to society in the form of mainstream movies. Today we see an increase in the number of biographical films about famous websites and the people who started them. The popularity of these films is due to the fact such sites have permeated our daily lives, either directly or indirectly (Musto, 2010). The amount of personal data we place on such sites is proportionate to our interest in keeping the data we put on them private and secure (Raine, Kiesler, Kang, Madden, 2013). Put simply, when our Internet privacy and security is jeopardized we take notice. The irony is that should our Internet privacy or security be breached, we would most likely be informed via the Internet first. Information travels fastest this way, and information in the form of source material is no exception. Source material is information that journalists use to create news stories. Often it is new media journalists, or so-called Fifth Estate media that can get original source material first. According to Alan Rusbridger, editor of *The Guardian*, a paradigm shift in news media is occurring as a result of this. (Rusbridger, 2010). Because the Fifth Estate often gets the scoops before the traditional Fourth Estate, the latter has become increasingly reliant on the former. Oftentimes, Fifth Estate journalists will publish independently, and when they do, it is typically with less discretion than traditional media outlets. Whether it be the whistleblower site WikiLeaks providing a way for people to leak secret information for all the world to see, or the social network site Facebook inviting its users to divulge their personal information, one societal trend seems clear: Internet privacy is becoming

less and less secure. It also seems clear that Hollywood will continue to produce films about this issue.

The huge box office success of *The Social Network* (2010), or the so-called Facebook movie, showed us that people turned to a Fourth Estate medium—cinema—to reflect on the newest form of Fifth Estate media: social media. *The Social Network* was a success due to Facebook's popularity and its prominence in many ordinary peoples' lives.

By contrast, the box office failure of the film *The Fifth Estate* (2013), the WikiLeaks movie, for one reason or another, simply did not attract a large number of moviegoers. One reason could be that while the famous whistleblower organization is known by many, few look to Hollywood for a cinematic depiction of an organization they feel has little or no relevance to their day to day lives. In fact, some critics, like John DeFore suggest the film was a financial flop due to WikiLeaks's lack of broad appeal to the majority. There is no denying that the leaking of highly confidential government and military documents by WikiLeaks has had a profound impact on government and journalism in the 21st Century, but this fact does not necessarily motivate people to pay to watch a movie about WikiLeaks. Put simply, neither WikiLeaks nor movies about it pique the deep interest of the masses because most people feel the organization does not affect their lives directly (Evans, 2013). In other other words, if WikiLeaks ceased to exist tomorrow, society would undoubtedly go on as it does. By contrast, however, if Facebook were to end its operations tomorrow, billions of social interactions would be severed, and a global outcry would surely ensue.

Notwithstanding the box office failure of *The Fifth Estate*, however, in this paper, I assert that this Hollywood film is of important educational value because of the two main takeaways the film presents:

The first takeaway for viewers of this film is its depiction of the impact WikiLeaks has had on global media and global politics after the

organization's disclosures of confidential war documents and diplomatic cables in 2010, the largest leaks of their kind in history.

The second takeaway for viewers relates to the issue of Internet privacy and how the film treats this subject. Viewers are invited to debate how today's Internet-connected society might define the meaning and value of Internet privacy.

The Fifth Estate effectively dramatizes the tension that occurred between the White House and WikiLeaks, as well as the tension between Fourth Estate media outlets and WikiLeaks after the whistleblower organization gained possession of highly classified US documents. These two subplots allow viewers to consider how WikiLeaks' disclosures became a game-changing event, both for diplomacy and journalism in the 21st Century. What drives the film's main narrative, however, is the relationship between the character who plays the founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, and that of his former partner and former WikiLeaks spokesperson, Daniel Domscheit-Berg. According to the film's director, Bill Condon, the story takes us from the start of their partnership, which begins cordial and collaborative, to the end of it as the two find themselves at odds with each other over the power structure of WikiLeaks and the dichotomous issue of privacy versus transparency. The latter is the issue at the core of the film, and one that Condon invites his audience to think deeply about and debate (Thompson, 2013). As with most Hollywood movies, *The Fifth Estate* has a fair amount of razzmatazz and stylistic features that make Hollywood movies so entertaining to watch. And *The Fifth Estate* *is* an entertaining movie. But, if one looks beyond the gloss, focusing instead on the two aforementioned takeaways, this film does raise relevant and timely issues viewers might find worthwhile to think about and discuss. Certainly these issues are pertinent in certain educational settings, a media studies course, for example.

What this paper attempts to offer the reader is a balanced yet critical assessment of the movie based on two issues it raises. First, I examine how accurately this film depicts the political and news media impact as a result of the leaks by comparing scenes depicted in the film with with real-world events that occurred within the time period this film is set. Second, I examine elements of the film that invite the viewer to think critically about privacy in the Internet Age. In my analyses, I chose scenes that I feel lend themselves to critical thought and debate, particularly in the classroom.

First and foremost, however, I examine in brief Hollywood's history of biographic films about whistleblowers and place *The Fifth Estate* in that context. I also define the film's plot and subplot summaries and structures, providing the reader with the essential framework upon which the script is built.

3. Hollywood whistleblower biopics

Hollywood is in the business of creating so-called movie magic, or cinematographic fantasy, which it does very well. The motion picture industry in this small part of the world has used and continues to use a fine-tuned formula called 'the Hollywood formula' to achieve its success. As mentioned in the introduction, it can be said that America's perception of itself, in part, is due to the powerful influence and hold Hollywood has on the American psyche. Hollywood's influence extends beyond America's borders, and, therefore, its global influence should not be underestimated as well. Hollywood movies, particularly blockbusters, are translated and distributed worldwide, and therefore have a tremendous impact on how people all around the world view America, and perhaps, to a degree, how the world views itself. By in large, however, Hollywood is geared to entertain audiences, not educate them. At times, though, it is successful in doing both. Big-budget

Hollywood biographical films about whistleblowers, for instance, have earned not only accolades, but the broad acceptance of moviegoers as well. Films such as *Silkwood* (1983), *The Insider* (1999), and *Erin Brockovich* (2000) have earned critical acclaim and awards, and, in the case of *Silkwood* and *Erin Brockovich*, have translated into box office successes. Hollywood films about whistleblowers have helped elevate the causes fought by the real people behind the characters. Such movies project important human issues, issues that might otherwise not receive the broad public attention they deserve. For example, had it not been for the silver screen, the stories of the real Karen Silkwood and the real Erin Brockovich and the causes they stood and fought for would, over time, yellow in pages of the public record. Hollywood is therefore helpful in raising awareness of certain issues by choosing to make films about them. In fact, the Hollywood formula, the popcorn, and the magic sometimes has the power to educate moviegoers by shedding light on human issues and their heroes. The Fifth Estate fits the whistleblower sub-genre of biographical movies because it is a story about an influential whistleblower organization; however, the justness of its cause and the agenda of its founder remain subjects of debate.

4. The Fifth Estate: How Hollywood Depicts WikiLeaks

Numerous films of late have been made about the whistleblower organization WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange, but perhaps the one that has the most applicability to the media studies or ESL/ESL class is *The Fifth Estate* (2013), an American biopic thriller that attempts to portray the impact Assange's organization has had on Washington, in particular the incumbent administration, as well as on Fourth Estate media agencies.

True to biographical motion picture form, *The Fifth Estate* dramatizes

the partnership of Assange and the former spokesperson for WikiLeaks, Daniel Domscheit-Berg. The timespan begins from when the two first met in 2007 and ends with their irreparable falling-out in 2010 that saw the end to both their friendship and professional partnership. To this end, the film's screenwriter, Josh Singer draws from two books, the first an exposé written by Domscheit-Berg titled *Inside WikiLeaks: My Time with Julian Assange at the World's Most Dangerous Website* (2011), and the second an in-depth account of WikiLeaks and Assange, written by Guardian journalists David Leigh and Luke Harding titled *WikiLeaks: Inside Julian Assange's War on Secrecy* (2011). Director Bill Condon worked closely with Singer in dealing with what he perceived to be a complex subject with complex characters. In numerous interviews, Condon expressed his objective for the film was to tell a real news story but do so in an exciting and entertaining way, a goal he found difficult to accomplish. And why would a seasoned Hollywood director not strive for these two things when making a Hollywood film? After all, excitement and entertainment are perhaps two of the most important ingredients of the Hollywood formula, and is in fact what fuels their industry. To this end, even Hollywood biopics tend to veer from veracity, often taking paths of conjecture and even distortion in the name of artistic license, and Condon certainly makes no excuses for exercising his own in this film. Condon's film is an unabashed dramatization of an organization and its leader, a man who has been one of the main driving forces in bringing the issue of privacy versus transparency to the collective front page of global news media in the 21st Century. Condon also attempts to capture the impact the leaks have had on government and journalism. What we as viewers take away from this Hollywood thriller is more than most movies of its kind. In this film, Condon offers more than most other directors in Hollywood: he lets us draw our own conclusions about Assange and WikiLeaks. Students of media are invited to do the same.

Again, the rationale for writing this paper is to remind the reader that The Fifth Estate, while entertaining to watch, is more than mere eye candy. The Fifth Estate offers true sustenance for the viewer to chew on as well.

5. Takeaway One: WikiLeaks' impact on government and news media

5.1 2010: The Year of Transparency

Before the end of the 21st Century's first decade, as shown in a 2009 US national poll, it seemed that transparency was what Americans demanded, especially from their governments (Bunting, Baron, 2011). Billions of people in the world demanded it, governments claimed to offer it, and journalists, including Fifth Estate media journalists stood poised to deliver it. In section 5.2 I look at the political backdrop to the year 2010, and focus on the issue of transparency by outlining the stances held on this issue by the Obama Administration and that of WikiLeaks. By understanding US President Barack Obama's stance on transparency, one can draw parallels with that of WikiLeaks' stance on transparency, and come to the conclusion that they are in agreement with each other.

One of the two overarching issues the viewer of The Fifth Estate is invited to explore is how WikiLeaks, starting in 2010, was able to get the attention of not only the US government, but traditional news media as well, by forcing both to face uncomfortable, and even damning levels of transparency.

5.2 Political backdrop

To understand the political backdrop to The Fifth Estate story, one must first be reminded of the geopolitical events of 2010, starting with the date WikiLeaks gained international fame in April of that year with its

release of a video that offered the entire world a new and disturbing insight into the US-lead war in Iraq. At the time of its release, US President Obama had been in office a little over a year, the Iraq War was in its sixth year, the War in Afghanistan in its eighth, and the first winds of Arab Spring were being felt, an event that would unfold in December of that same year. The Fifth Estate story ends in September 2010 with the irreconcilable rift occurring between WikiLeaks spokesperson, Daniel Domscheit-Berg and its founder, Julian Assange.

5.3 The leaks and the people who leaked them

WikiLeaks released three major disclosures in 2010: the Afghan War Diary in July, the Iraq War Logs in October, and the US diplomatic cables in November, but not before releasing a film it titled Collateral Murder. Collateral Murder was released on April 2010, and contains classified and graphic footage of a US Army, air-to-ground helicopter attack on civilians and two Reuters news reporters. The release of Collateral Murder garnered the attention of worldwide media. Soon afterwards, the name WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange, became well-known to many people around the world. Those who took the most interest in these disclosures was the US government and US military, mainly because the person accused of and arrested for leaking most of the documents to WikiLeaks came from the ranks of the US Army. Chelsea Manning, then known as Private First Class Bradley Manning, an intelligence analyst, was arrested on May 27, 2010 in connection with a leak containing the Iraq War Logs and the US diplomatic cables. The identity of the person or persons responsible for leaking the Afghan War Logs is yet unknown.

5.4 Transparency from WikiLeaks to the White House

What is transparency to WikiLeaks?

According to the WikiLeaks website, the organization states that it is a “not-for-profit media organisation.” (WikiLeaks, May, 2011). The organization’s stated goal is “to bring important news and information to the public.” The site also emphasizes that should anyone wish to leak information to WikiLeaks they can do so securely and anonymously. WikiLeaks believes publishing leads to better transparency, resulting in the formation of an improved society.

Believing that the world’s publishing media was not doing a sufficient job in their reporting, WikiLeaks saw a need for change, and in 2007 the organization was created, offering the world a “new model of journalism.” WikiLeaks, for their part in media, offered something new: a nonprofit, cooperative, unrestrictive, transparent, and secure model of media collection and distribution.

Assange, when interviewed by Bivol, a Bulgarian site for investigative journalism, was asked if he had an ideal he could explain in a single sentence, he replied, “I believe in the right to communicate and the inviolability of history, privacy for the weak and transparency for the powerful.” (Bivol, May, 2011).

5.5 What is transparency to the Obama administration?

A memorandum on the subject of transparency and open government was written by US President Obama, and published on January 29, 2009 in the US Federal Register, just nine days after taking office. In the memo, Obama states that his Administration is “committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government.” In an effort to strengthen democracy, he states that his administration will “ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration.”

(Obama, Jan. 2009). In terms of the Internet's role in creating openness, he suggests that executive departments and agencies should make information about their operations and decisions available online, and accessible to the public. Also mentioned in his memo is the need for the executive department and agencies to cooperate with nonprofit organizations.

On November 16, 2009, eight months into his first term, President Obama held a forum in Shanghai to discuss, among various issues, issues related to openness and transparency in governments as well as on the Internet. On these issues he reiterated the points contained in his US Federal Register memo on transparency and open government, but added that he strongly supports non-censorship and non-restricted Internet use, access and technology. He ended the discussion on the issue by stating, "there's some price that you pay for openness, there's no denying that. But I think that the good outweighs the bad so much that it's better to maintain that openness." (Obama, Nov. 2009). Five months later, WikiLeaks would begin releasing uncensored, highly classified leaked US documents for all the world to see.

5.6 How The Fifth Estate film depicts the impact the leaks have had on government

The main plot of *The Fifth Estate* centers on the partnership of WikiLeaks spokesperson, Daniel Domscheit-Berg and its founder, Julian Assange. The subplot that arises later in the film, however, provides additional and necessary structure by dramatizing the US government's response to WikiLeaks' disclosures of 2010. Most of the news footage used in the film is real, but the characters portraying US State Department and White House members are fictional. The fact is what actually happened behind closed doors at the State Department and White House during this period will remain conjecture until the public is offered insight to the actual events.

Nevertheless, the dramatized scenes of the US government's response to the leak are plausible based on actual news reports and official White House statements. The actual news clips used in the film serve to remind us of the negative impact WikiLeaks had had on the US government, and still does, as reported in The Associated Press in 2013 (Dishneau, 2013).

5.7 Four film elements showing the impact the leaks have had on government

In this section I examine four scenes from the film and define the specific political issues they depict. I then present lines taken from these scenes, ones I feel best dramatize each of the four issues. Finally, I present quotes from actual people in government in an effort to validate the scenes. The chart below helps delineate a cohesion between drama and reality in relation to political issues depicted in the film. The leftmost column of the chart marks the four political issues, starting from the top row with the WikiLeaks video that created the initial political and news stir. The next issue relates to the US diplomatic cables, followed by the issue of the US government's legal actions taken against Assange, and the row at the bottom relates to cynicism in US foreign diplomacy. The second column shows the selected scenes and lines from the movie that address each of the four issues. The third and rightmost column shows quotes from actual people in government which pertain to the issues.

Issue	Lines (of characters in The Fifth Estate film)	Quotes (of actual people in government)
<p>1. Collateral Murder video</p> <p>- <i>On April 5, 2010, WikiLeaks publishes 'collateral Murder,' a film it claims depicts "the indiscriminate slaying of over a dozen people in the Iraqi suburb of New Baghdad — including two Reuters news staff." (WikiLeaks) The video received a large media response, and commanded the attention of the US military, and shortly after, the White House and US State Department. The response as portrayed in The Fifth Estate are plausible based on the responses given by people in the US government at and since the release of Collateral Murder.</i></p>	<p>"Tell the press the truth, those soldiers were following protocol, this is computer geeks looking at the war through a pinhole."</p> <p>- <i>Jim Boswell, the character playing the role of Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security, advises (character playing) NSA Deputy Sam Coulson on how to field press questions in the wake of the Collateral Murder video release.</i></p>	<p>"(The Pentagon) insisted that the helicopters' crew acted within the rules of engagement."</p> <p>- <i>Pentagon spokesperson (July 2007) in response to first news of the incident (McElroy, 2010).</i></p> <p>"(Viewing the 'Collateral Murder' video) is like "looking at a situation through a soda straw."</p> <p>- <i>Robert Gates, former United States Secretary of Defense, in response to the release of Collateral Murder video (Miles, 2010).</i></p> <p>"We're not scared of one guy with one keyboard and a laptop."</p> <p>- <i>Robert Gibbs, former White House Press Secretary, in response to questions related to security breach caused by leak. (Jones, 2010)</i></p>
<p>2. The US diplomatic cables</p> <p>- <i>In various scenes, the film dramatizes the impact the leak has had on both the White House and US State Department. These scenes, in addition to real media footage, appear in The Fifth</i></p>	<p>"This leak puts our lives and our allies' lives at risk."</p> <p>- <i>Sarah Shaw, the character playing the role of US Deputy Undersecretary of State, in response to the leak made by WikiLeaks</i></p>	<p>"In the most clear terms the disclosure of any information by individuals and or organizations which puts the lives of United States and its partners' service members and civilians at risk".</p> <p>- <i>Hillary Clinton, former US</i></p>

<p><i>Estate, creating an accurate portrayal of how the leak was felt by the US government.</i></p>		<p><i>Secretary of State, in response to the leak published by WikiLeaks (Fallon, 2010).</i></p>
<p>3. US government efforts to indict Assange</p> <p>- <i>After it became known that WikiLeaks was responsible for the release and publication of top-secret US documents, news media reports that the US Justice Department is doing all it can to indict Assange. Some journalists suggest they may attempt to indict Assange on espionage charges under the Espionage Act of 1917. Scenes in the movie portray the media and political buzz surrounding this issue.</i></p>	<p><i>Nick Davies (film character):</i> “(Assange can be indicted under) The Espionage Act? You can’t be serious.”</p> <p><i>lawyer (film character):</i> “(Yes,) if the Attorney General can show (Assange) tried to convince a source to leak information...”</p> <p>- <i>The character playing Nick Davies, an investigative journalist for The Guardian, asks a lawyer if what she said is true, that Assange could be prosecuted under the Espionage Act of 1917. The lawyer, in response, claimed that it was possible under certain circumstances.</i></p>	<p>“I’m confident that the (US) Justice Department is figuring out how to prosecute him...”</p> <p>“Under the Espionage Act, anyone who has “unauthorized possession to information relating to the national defense” and has reason to believe it could harm the United States may be prosecuted if he publishes it or “willfully” retains it when the government has demanded its return.”</p> <p>- <i>Jeffrey H. Smith, former CIA general counsel, in response to potential charges against Assange (Nakashima, Markon, 2010).</i></p>
<p>4. Cynicism in US foreign diplomacy</p> <p>- <i>American cynicism is often misunderstood by people of other countries. When WikiLeaks released the US diplomatic cables, the US State Department’s brand of cynicism was put on full display. Some scenes in The Fifth Estate reflect a sense of this. Listed here is one of them.</i></p>	<p><i>Sam Coulson:</i> “They have an agenda?”</p> <p><i>Sarah Shaw:</i> “Truth, justice, the American way.”</p> <p>- <i>Sam Coulson, the character playing NSA Deputy, asks Sarah Shaw, the character who plays Deputy Undersecretary of State, if the (WikiLeaks) organization has an agenda. Shaw cynically replies, using the popular American phrase in response.</i></p>	<p>U.S. diplomatic cables reflect “the full measure of cynicism” in American foreign policy.</p> <p>- <i>Dmitry Medvedev, Prime Minister of Russia, in response to leaked US diplomatic cables (Associated Press, 2010).</i></p>

5.8 Scenes Analyses of four movie elements showing the impact the leaks have had on government

Since the release of *Collateral Murder*, over 14.5 million people have viewed it on Youtube (collateralmurder.com, 2010). In actuality, many people did take notice, and its release did make headlines around the world. WikiLeaks released the video to attract attention to the war in Iraq, and later, as the Iraq War Logs would reveal, a more complete picture of how the war was being fought and at what costs. Though the scope of *The Fifth Estate* does not cover this topic extensively, it does show the effect WikiLeaks has had on certain agencies, including the US military and White House and by showing that they downplayed the relevance of the leaked video and of WikiLeaks in general. After learning that WikiLeaks was in possession of much more in the way of top-secret files, the US Government's strong condemnation of WikiLeaks was broadly reported by the media. *The Fifth Estate* captured this. Later, it was reported that the US Government had explored ways to indict Assange. This response by the US government made headlines as well, and one that was dramatized in the movie. When the diplomatic cables, or so-called "Cablegate" was published, the world got a firsthand look at just how cynical some US diplomats can be toward their international counterparts. There are scenes in the film that convey this sense of cynicism.

These four scenes serve as an accurate historical reference, offering the viewer a background and backdrop to the political events that occurred during the time WikiLeaks made its existence known to all. As a result of the leaks, the manner in which politicians conduct their foreign policies, affairs and even wars is now, more than ever, open to the scrutiny of the masses.

5.9 How The Fifth Estate depicts what impact the leaks have had on news media

As the main plot of the film progresses, (the characters playing) Assange and Domscheit-Berg find themselves working side by side with (the character playing) The Guardian's Nick Davies, an investigative journalist. Davies attempts to broker a deal with Assange about the need to redact names before publication in order to protect people, both their privacy and safety. Tensions rise between the two parties as a result of this, and it soon becomes apparent who wields greater power: Assange. This revelation draws into question many issues related to privacy, and the publication of personal information.

5.10 Four movie elements showing what impact the leaks have had on news media

As in the previous section, in this section I choose four scenes I feel best dramatize the impact on news media as a result of the leaks, certain issues they depict, and correlations to what was said about them by prominent people in both Fourth and Fifth Estate medias. Quotes are provided to show that the scenes reflect actual sentiments felt by news media professionals. The chart below helps delineate these relationships. The leftmost column lists the four media issues, starting at the top row with the issue regarding WikiLeaks' contribution to journalism, followed by the issue of WikiLeaks' place in journalism, then the issue of disclosure, and the bottommost row looks at evidence to suggest WikiLeaks is becoming a new media empire. The center column lists quotes taken from scenes, showing dramatized examples of the four issues. The third and final column shows quotes from actual people working in Fourth and Fifth Estate media in response to these issues.

Issue	Lines (of characters in The Fifth Estate film)	Quotes (of actual people in 4th & 5th Estate news media)
<p>1. WikiLeaks' contribution to journalism</p> <p>- <i>Undoubtedly, this issue will be debated for many years to come, and ultimately up to historians to decide. However, the sheer volume of the leaked documents cannot be overstated, and this feeling is expressed in many ways in the movie. Many journalists the world over are in agreement, including many of the largest news agencies, including the Guardian.</i></p>	<p>“According to the Guardian we have had more scoops in three years than the Washington Post has had in thirty”</p> <p>- <i>The character portraying Daniel Domscheit-Berg, spokesperson for WikiLeaks, is speaking to a audience at the Berlin Chaos Computer Club in December 2010, stating the accomplishments of WikiLeaks in that year.</i></p>	<p>“Wikileaks has had more scoops in 3 years than The Washington Post has had in 30.”</p> <p>- <i>Clay Shirky, writer, consultant and teacher on the social and economic effects of Internet technologies, (April 2010) wrote on his blog, and was picked up and quoted by The Guardian's education editor, Richard Adams, on the same day. (Adams, 2010)</i></p>
<p>2. WikiLeaks' place in journalism</p> <p>- <i>According to some, WikiLeaks fills a need. The Internet has eroded the so-called fourth estate media model to the degree news agencies cannot afford to spend as much as they would like on investigative journalism, a gap that fifth estate media, or Internet media, can possibly fill. Because this shift occurring between fourth and fifth estate medias is still in its infancy, the true place for agencies like WikiLeaks is an ongoing issue, drawing into the debate the privacy versus transparency dichotomy, a concern on the</i></p>	<p>“We all want information to be free, but investigative journalism is pricey. When newspapers get squeezed it's the first to go, that's why the providers of first rate source material like WikiLeaks are so important.”</p> <p>- <i>The character portraying Nick Davies, an investigative journalist for The Guardian, speaks to an audience at the '2009 SKUP Investigative Journalism Conference' in Norway, and remarks on the need for newspapers to recognize the need for organizations like WikiLeaks.</i></p>	<p>“News is expensive and unless we find a new financial model we won't be able to deliver it and I don't quite see where that new financial model is coming from...”</p> <p>- <i>The real-life Nick Davies, an investigative journalist for The Guardian, (August 2008) warns newsprint media agencies of the need for fiscal reform. (O'Brien, 2008)</i></p> <p>“I'm arguing that journalists, generally, are now not given the time to do their work properly, which is a big, big problem for them if they are trying to uncover the truth. So I'm looking for other resources which we can pull</p>

<p><i>minds of media agencies and the public alike.</i></p>		<p>in to help us, and one example would be NGOs...”</p> <p>- <i>In September 2010 at the National Broadcast Congress (Omroepcongres), the real-life Nick Davies expresses his opinion about changes he proposes print news media should make in how they gather information. (Broadcast Press, Hilversum BV, 2011)</i></p>
<p>3. Full vs. limited disclosure</p> <p>- <i>Assange demands full disclosure (of leaked documents), or so the film shows. In actuality, Assange, according to a statement printed on his website, believes “in the right to communicate and the inviolability of history, privacy for the weak, transparency for the powerful.” In any case, when dealing with Assange directly, The Guardian demanded redactions (deletions of names of people who could be harmed as a result of a published full disclosure) whereas Assange’s determination was to publish in full.</i></p>	<p>“So it’s a deal, we publish, you publish; we redact, you redact!”</p> <p>“The Guardian can’t condone publishing something that could put lives in danger. And morals aside, this speaks to how you are perceived. You are starting an information war with the US government, you mustn’t hand them ammunition.”</p> <p>- <i>The character playing Nick Davies, an investigative journalist for The Guardian, speaks to Julian Assange’s character in an emphatic way that he must play by traditional news media rules, namely those that pertain to personal (information) privacy.</i></p>	<p>“(The) Fifth Estate’s portrayal of the Guardian’s work with Wikileaks is accurate in describing the running dispute between journalists who wanted to redact documents to make them safe and Julian Assange who wanted no such restraint. We ran dozens of stories, based on the biggest ever leak of military and intelligence material. We caused plenty of political embarrassment but we did so without jeopardising anybody’s safety or damaging any nation’s security.”</p> <p>- <i>The real life Nick Davies, an investigative journalist for The Guardian, stands by The Fifth Estate’s portrayal of the dispute between WikiLeaks and The Guardian. (Davies, 2013)</i></p>
<p>4. WikiLeaks a Fifth Estate media empire?</p> <p>- <i>Is Julian Assange the Rupert Murdoch of the Fifth</i></p>	<p>“(Assange) is not a source; he’s the head of a huge media empire that’s accountable to no one—and we put him there.”</p>	<p>“There is a moment in the movie when Nick Davies... points out, quite truthfully, that Mr. Assange is “not a source; he’s the head of a</p>

<p><i>Estate? That is a point the movie The Fifth Estate makes, as evidence by the title, lines delivered by the character playing The Guardian's Nick Davies (including the final lines of the movie) and of the power that Assange is shown to have exerted on traditional fourth estate media.</i></p>	<p>- <i>The character playing Nick Davies, an investigative journalist for The Guardian, laments that his agency is responsible for bringing Julian Assange into journalistic and political prominence.</i></p>	<p>huge media empire that's accountable to no one—and we put him there.”</p> <p>- <i>James Bowman, movie and culture critic, resident scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, (December 2013) said that what Nick Davies's character says in the movie (despite whether or not the real life Davies actually said it) is the truth. (Bowman, 2013)</i></p>
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5.11 Scenes Analyses of four movie elements showing what impact the leaks have had on news media

The leaks of 2010 were the largest of their kind ever. It is therefore easy for the viewer to grasp the magnitude of the leaks, and the impact that they have had on news media. The veritable trove of intelligence contained in the leaks has kept journalists busy ever since they were released and will surely continue to for many years to come. In that sense, WikiLeaks contribution to journalism is immeasurable at this time.

The Internet allows for extremely quick and easy sharing of information and news. Often times, information and news are shared for free. What this means to traditional newsprint agencies is that the high revenue they once made from sales and advertising has all but dried up. Out of survival, some agencies have turned to Fifth Estate journalism (e.g. WikiLeaks, Twitter, the blogosphere, etc.) to get scoops or source material for their stories. This is done out of temporal necessity, i.e. traditional news agencies are inclined to go wherever news stories break and quite soon after they break, or out economic necessity, i.e. it is more cost-effective for them to get stories via reputable bloggers, for example, than to pay investigative journalists to

get them.

It would appear WikiLeaks has found a place in today's journalism, and if not WikiLeaks, other whistleblower organizations like it. What appears less clear is the issue of disclosure. In most cases WikiLeaks does not edit what it publishes; therefore, judging by WikiLeaks' high level of transparency, the public can expect material published on the Internet to be more transparent, not less so than publications of traditional news agency.

Whether or not WikiLeaks is or will become a media empire is, in the classic sense of the word, not what has the Fourth Estate concerned. In fact, because WikiLeaks' agenda is not profit driven, any power it might wield would not come from financial wealth but from a wealth of information. And information is the fuel on which the news media engine runs. Noam Chomsky once said, "He who controls the media controls the minds of the public." If what Chomsky said is true, it would be fair to argue that traditional media agencies (as well as governments) prefer to continue to have the upper hand when it comes to media control.

6. Takeaway Two: WikiLeaks' impact on Internet privacy

6.1 Privacy in the Internet Age

A few scenes in the film *The Social Network* deal with privacy issues on a personal level. The film gave us a glance back on our recent history, and at how some people reacted to having their personal information spread over the Internet at a time before social network sites (SNS) became widely used, at a time when most people communicated to each other by email in a relatively private manner. Though SNS usage continues to grow to this day, so do concerns over personal Internet privacy, according to a recent Pew Research Internet Project survey (Brenner, Smith, 2013). Nevertheless,

it would appear that society's desire to socialize and communicate via the Internet outweighs the need for a guarantee of privacy, something that may in fact be impossible in our increasingly Net connected world (Rainie, Kiesler, Kang, Madden, 2013). News media regularly warns us of the risks associated with posting personal information on the Internet, yet most of us continue to shop, pay bills, communicate, and share data using it. A 2007 Pew Internet & American Life Project Survey shows American's daily actions and transactions are inextricably tied to the Internet, a trend that shows no signs of slowing (Horrigan, 2008).

On a government level, *The Fifth Estate* shows us that information held by some of the most secretive organizations on the planet cannot be kept secure either. Edward Snowden's May 2013 release of US National Security Agency documents, for example, contains a massive amount of global surveillance data. Snowden's very action as well as the information contained in the leaked documents suggest that Internet privacy is virtually impossible to secure.

Society at large can agree on Internet rules that define, for example, "netiquette" (Net etiquette), and, over time, such a thing may become ingrained in our culture. However, how society governs etiquette on the Internet is one thing, how it governs or ensures Internet privacy is a more complex issue. Whether it is used for social purposes, military or government purposes, or for commerce, the Internet has no borders, and any and all information that flows through it can be leaked. As a society, we can debate the meaning and value of Internet privacy, but the truth is, as we learn in the film, *The Fifth Estate*, a breach in privacy can sometimes occur due to the action of just a single person, and therein lies the danger.

6.2 Four movie scenes dealing with the subject of Internet privacy

In this section, I choose four scenes from the film that deal with the subject of Internet privacy. Because of the ethical nature of this subject, I choose scenes that speak to the viewer on that level, scenes that invite the viewer to examine his or her own ethical stance on the matter, starting with a scene depicting Assange's take on freedom and privacy.

Scene 1: Assange: Fighting for freedom, for privacy, for the right to remain concealed

The first selected scene shows Julian Assange's character giving a presentation about WikiLeaks' mission at the 2007 International Berlin Chaos Computer Club Conference. Because WikiLeaks is not well known, only a few people are in attendance. Despite this, Assange's character speaks passionately when explaining the basis of his organization, reflecting on his twenty-year fight for Internet freedom. He begins by saying,

“When I was a grad student in Melbourne I became interested in information and how it flows through society and how when new information comes to light, it can bring about great change.”

He goes on to say that conspiracy and corruption grows as a result of the sharing of secrets with more and more people, and that the only way to stop this is to,

“find one moral man, one whistleblower... someone willing to expose all these secrets – That man could topple the most repressive of regimes...”

He adds, however, that the reason people do not expose the truth is because they fear retribution. He then explains his plan to eliminate a potential whistleblower's fear by giving the audience a technical explanation on how

informants are protected, including his hope for this technology:

“But what if you could remove that fear? Twenty years ago I bought my first modem and joined a legion (called) Cypher-punks, fighting for freedom, for privacy, for the right to remain concealed in clouds of code. Today’s hackers take it for granted, but they surf the Internet because of the programs we created to hide data, to hide our identities... and even then I knew this technology could hold the the key to a whole new form of social justice...”

He then shifts the speech to what he is doing at present, stating,

“we’ve honed our technology to the point that even I don’t know the identity of our sources. And if the whistleblower’s identity is secret, then he has nothing to fear...”

In this scene, we learn that Julian Assange has in mind a well-defined vision for WikiLeaks. He describes what he has done to fight for Internet freedom, and what he is doing to create a new form of social justice. The lines from this scene concur with statements made either by Assange himself, or ones published on the WikiLeaks website.

In the next scene selection, Scene 2, we see Assange’s character delivering another presentation at the International Berlin Chaos Computer Club Conference two years after his 2007 presentation at the same venue. This scene, showing a large and enthusiastic audience, depicts the recognition and support for WikiLeaks’ work.

Scene 2: WikiLeaks: Privacy for the individual, transparency for institutions

After being shown an overview of WikiLeaks achievements, the audience responds with a standing ovation. The character playing Assange takes the stage to listen to a remark made by a woman from East Berlin. The

woman commends him, and assures him that the Berlin Wall would have come down much sooner if former East Germany had someone like him. She also talks about the personal risk one had to face for voicing one's opinion while living under communist rule. After the woman makes her statement, he credits her for capturing the spirit of WikiLeaks and adds,

“(WikiLeaks is) trying to achieve privacy for the individual, transparency for institutions, with your personal safety as a whistleblower guaranteed through anonymity.”

This scene captures, almost verbatim, the the real-life Assange's ideals. In May 2011, Assange was quoted saying, “I believe in... privacy for the weak and transparency for the powerful.” The WikiLeaks website gives a thorough explanation of how its organization guarantees whistleblower anonymity by providing “an innovative, secure and anonymous way for sources to leak information” (WikiLeaks, 2011).

The third selected scene, Scene 3, depicts how one's ideals might be challenged or compromised. After Bradley Manning is arrested in May 2010 for leaking classified documents to WikiLeaks, there is a government campaign to arrest and indict Julian Assange. According to the film, this puts pressure on Assange to publish the leaked documents quickly.

Scene 3: Transparency vs. privacy debate: The point of WikiLeaks

In this scene, Julian Assange's character and that of his spokesperson, Daniel Domscheit-Berg debate on how to manage the release of the leaked documents. After having read a statement made by famous Pentagon Papers whistleblower, Daniel Ellsberg, Assange insists that WikiLeaks publish all documents in full. Domscheit-Berg disagrees. The following scene takes place in a subway train in Brussels, and tension is high as Julian believes they are being followed.

Assange: Daniel Ellsberg put out a statement, he said they're coming

after us. We've got to publish now.

Domscheit-Berg: *Julian, it's hundreds of thousands of pages of sensitive material. It's not like the (Collateral Murder) video, the docs are full of jargon, they're totally impenetrable – we wouldn't know what the hell we were publishing.*

Assange: *So we let the historians decide. I thought the whole point of this organization was to publish in full.*

Domscheit-Berg: *I thought the point was protecting whistleblowers.*

Viewers are to understand that the tension and discord that exists between these two men is a reflection of their differences in character as well as their conflicting stances on the issue of privacy. The movie portrays Assange as a self-centered zealot who has an unbending policy of full disclosure, while Domscheit-Berg is portrayed as a dutiful and level-headed person. Earlier in the film Domscheit-Berg is shown to be in alliance with with Assange, but later on the film shows him at odds with him on the issue of privacy. This portrayal of Assange, in part, is based on the real Domscheit-Berg's portrayal of the man. The real Julian Assange disagrees with this portrayal, but whether or not the movie is accurate in its portrayal of these two men does not diminish the importance of the transparency versus privacy debate. This scene simply exemplifies it.

The real-life Daniel Domscheit-Berg, according to his book, quit WikiLeaks in September 2010 because of Assange's absolute control over the organization's direction. Domscheit-Berg sought to form a whistleblower organization with a more egalitarian structure. For its part, WikiLeaks states, "the population has a right to privacy: the right not to be subject to mass surveillance by their governments." On their website, WikiLeaks claims to have developed and improved what it calls its "harm minimisation procedure." While WikiLeaks claims to not censor their information, according to what is written on their website, they will remove "identifying details

from original documents to protect life and limb of innocent people.” It would appear, based on this statement, that since 2010, Julian Assange has eased his stance on full disclosure, thereby securing the privacy and security of innocents.

In the fourth and final selected scene, Scene 4, the character portraying Daniel Domscheit-Berg has a discussion with the character portraying Domscheit-Berg’s (fictional) girlfriend, Anke. The scene not only depicts Domscheit-Berg’s devotion to the WikiLeaks’ stance on full disclosure, but also how others might as well. In October 2009, WikiLeaks publishes a full, unedited list of “the racist” British National Party (BNP) members, including personal addresses, phone numbers, etc.

Scene 4: The ethics of whistleblowing

Domscheit-Berg’s girlfriend, “Anke,” is reading the news story about the BNP membership list, and decides to question the ethics of this leak published by WikiLeaks. Domscheit-Berg apologizes for not listening to what Anke says, so she reiterates, expressing her objection to the leak in its unedited form:

Anke: It’s just the addresses I don’t get.

Domscheit-Berg: What?

Anke: The National Party members. I mean, those people should be exposed, but you published their personal information, phone numbers, home addresses...

Domscheit-Berg: They were in the documents. (He retorts, dryly.)

Anke: Yes, but why not cut them out? They have families, children... someone could get hurt.

Domscheit-Berg: Editing reflects bias. Our sources, the people on the site, they trust us ’cause we don’t screw with the documents. As Julian says, a free people must have knowledge.

Anke: Or, as (George) Orwell says, Big Brother is watching.

This particular scene is completely fictional, but it does manage to capture the sentiment many people have on the issue of Internet privacy, both of common people, and people in high places. Iain Overton, Editor in Chief of The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, when interviewed for a Swedish documentary on WikiLeaks said, “By and large, WikiLeaks is a force for good (but) Wikileaks is very, very powerful and I think one has to be cautious of anything that is very, very powerful.” The danger of having one man (Assange) in a position to publish private information is something for the viewer to consider.

7. Conclusion

According to their website, WikiLeaks believes that society can be improved by offering transparency through publishing. WikiLeaks’ opinion is that the “world’s (Fourth Estate) publishing media” is doing an insufficient job and therefore sought to offer the world a more transparent model of media collection and distribution. To this end, Hollywood succeeded in showing that WikiLeaks may have succeeded in that goal. The Fifth Estate does not explore the full impact of what WikiLeaks had on journalism, government, nor the manner in which information moves through the Internet; however, this film offers the viewer an intriguing look at a new media realm that has shown the power to shape all news media. The Fifth Estate does this by raising issues relevant to anyone who follows world news, and anyone who uses the Internet. What remains to be seen, however, is how WikiLeaks has shaped governmental policy. Japan’s new secrecy law seems to be in response to the leaks published by WikiLeaks and whistleblowers like Snowden and Manning. At the time of this writing, US President Barack Obama, however, has not changed his stance on transparency and open

government from his original stance on the subject, while at the same time “the Obama administration has shown a particular propensity to go after leakers and has launched more investigations than any previous administration” (Finn, Horwitz, 2013). Early in his presidency, US President Obama said, “there’s some price that you pay for openness.” The question is, what price will US citizens be willing to pay to keep that openness? What price would anyone be willing to pay?

A classroom exploration of the Fifth Estate landscape: Talking Points

In this part, building on the takeaways outlined earlier in this paper, here are talking points provided for teachers who wish to show this film and discuss topics related to it with their students. A specific lesson plan based on the film *The Fifth Estate* is beyond the scope of this paper; however, the following talking points would compliment a discussion-based course, particularly one involving media studies.

The first takeaway of this film involves the impact WikiLeaks has had on global media and global politics. And for that, the following talking points are suggested:

- How have the leaks published by WikiLeaks influenced global news media today? Cite examples.
- How has WikiLeaks’ influence been positive? How has it been negative? Cite examples.
- Did WikiLeaks do the right or just thing by publishing the video *Collateral Murder*, offering some transparency to the war in Afghanistan? The same question for its publication of the diplomatic cables: was it right or just? Explain.
- How did WikiLeaks’ release of these things influence global politics? Cite examples.

- Is your government more or less transparent than it was five years ago? Explain.
- WikiLeaks believes publishing leads to better transparency, resulting in the formation of an improved society. How do you feel about this?
- Julian Assange, when asked if he had an ideal he could explain in a single sentence, he replied, “I believe in the right to communicate and the inviolability of history, privacy for the weak and transparency for the powerful.” Use historical or other examples to explain what you think Assange is saying. What is your opinion of this ideal of his?
- US President Obama, on January 29, 2009 published a memo that stated that his administration will “ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency...” In your opinion, has Obama achieved public trust and a system of transparency? How about your country’s government, does it have your trust? Does it ensure a system of transparency? Cite examples for both.

The second takeaway of this film involves Internet privacy. In this section, students are invited to debate how today’s Internet-connected societies might define the meaning and value of Internet privacy. The following talking points may help guide a discussion related this issue.

- Some people believe Internet privacy is virtually impossible to secure. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Cite examples.
- Often times breaches in privacy occur from the actions of one person. Cite examples of how privacy has been breached by a single person, either in your country or abroad.
- WikiLeaks’ mission statement states that it is trying to achieve “privacy for the individual, transparency for institutions, with your personal safety as a whistleblower guaranteed through anonymity.” With your teacher and/or classmates, discuss what this statement means and what it means to individuals, institutions, and companies.

- Iain Overton, Editor in Chief of The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, said, “By and large, WikiLeaks is a force for good (but) Wikileaks is very, very powerful and I think one has to be cautious of anything that is very, very powerful.” What do you think he meant by this? Share your thoughts and opinions.
- WikiLeaks states, “the population has a right to privacy: the right not to be subject to mass surveillance by their governments.” Share your thoughts and opinions about this statement.

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