



## Conspicuous redemption? Reflections on the promises and perils of the 'Celebritization' of climate change

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### ABSTRACT

With rising public awareness of climate change, celebrities have become an increasingly important community of non nation-state 'actors' influencing discourse and action, thereby comprising an emergent climate science-policy-celebrity complex. Some feel that these amplified and prominent voices contribute to greater public understanding of climate change science, as well as potentially catalyze climate policy cooperation. However, critics posit that increased involvement from the entertainment industry has not served to influence substantive long-term advancements in these arenas; rather, it has instead reduced the politics of climate change to the domain of fashion and fad, devoid of political and public saliency. Through tracking media coverage in Australia, Canada, the United States, and United Kingdom, we map out the terrain of a 'Politicized Celebrity System' in attempts to cut through dualistic characterizations of celebrity involvement in politics. We develop a classification system of the various types of climate change celebrity activities, and situate movements in contemporary consumer- and spectacle-driven carbon-based society. Through these analyses, we place dynamic and contested interactions in a spatially and temporally-sensitive 'Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities' model. In so doing, first we explore how these newly 'authorized' speakers and 'experts' might open up spaces in the public sphere and the science/policy nexus through 'celebritization' effects. Second, we examine how the celebrity as the 'heroic individual' seeking 'conspicuous redemption' may focus climate change actions through individualist frames. Overall, this paper explores potential promises, pitfalls and contradictions of this increasingly entrenched set of 'agents' in the cultural politics of climate change. Thus, as a form of climate change action, we consider whether it is more effective to 'plant' celebrities instead of trees.

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### 1. Introduction: Industry without smokestacks

'Polar bears are imperiled by the melting of the Arctic ice. The Bush administration, which has yet to decide whether to list the polar bear as a threatened species, understands the power of symbols, and has warned government scientists not to speak publicly about polar bears or climate change at international meetings. Knut, the cub on our cover, was born in the Berlin Zoo. We brought him together with Leonardo DiCaprio the only way we could, in a photomontage. Knut was photographed by Annie Leibovitz in Berlin. DiCaprio, no stranger to icebergs, was photographed by Leibovitz at the Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon, in Iceland. Yes, we know, there are no polar bears in Iceland. If current trends continue, there won't be any in Canada either.' ~ Pre-

face to the Second Annual Green Issue of *Vanity Fair* magazine, May 2007.

That *Vanity Fair*—the magazine of record for Hollywood *haute couture* politics and culture—can un-ironically present investigative journalism on the privatization of water and the 'gasping' Amazonian environment amidst meteorically-expensive designer clothing, watches, and sunglasses advertisements is at the heart of this paper. Clearly, as the opening selection highlights, it seems now that both celebrities, who are more often crossing the boundaries of 'stardom' and politics, and the environment have found powerful cultural symbols in each other. Indeed, as we argue here, the extent to which these connections are being made is unprecedented in their sheer number and intensity of media exposure.

This increase in media coverage of celebrities and climate change/global warming illustrates a need for an understanding of the new and changing connections of the *celebritization* of climate change where media, politics and science intersect. We thus wish to build on the somewhat disparate literatures on global environmental discourses (e.g. Taylor and Buttel, 1992; Hajer, 1995; Adger et al., 2001), work on the commodification of nature (e.g. Castree,

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2003; Escobar, 1996; Price, 1995; Smith, 1998), aesthetic politics and commodity cultures (e.g. Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Goodman, 2004; Jackson, 1999, 2002) and cultural studies (e.g. Marshall, 2004; Turner, 2004; Cashmore, 2006). The over-riding task of this paper is to provide a more critical and nuanced approach to celebrity politics and their potential effects by introducing actors and other celebrities as important non-nation-state figures in the discursive, material and media politics surrounding climate change. In this, we work to get beyond dualistic characterizations of celebrity politics as mere 'distraction' (Weiskel, 2005)—a position that draws from and re-works parts of the Frankfurt School—versus 'awareness' raising and new forms of 'deliberative democracy' (Goodnight, 2005; Corner and Pels, 2003). What we are proposing here, then, is a new lens from which to address and conceptualize the growing confluences of science, celebrities, and politics in a novel form of the *cultural politics of climate change*.

In presenting these lenses, what we have termed the *Politicized Celebrity System* and the model of the *Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities* that this System slots into, we remain rather ambivalent in this paper to the wider consequences of the growing celebrityization of climate change and the *spectacle-ization* of politics more generally. While this is perhaps too ambivalent for some, it is for reasons of space that we reserve more overtly critical and normative commentary for future work on this topic; rather the descriptions, characterizations and conceptualizations of the *conspicuous redemption* of celebrities in their media involvement in climate change should be seen as an initial opening up of critical and theoretical space from which to investigate this particularly interesting phenomenon in the contemporary cultural and media landscapes of the environment.

We proceed as follows. First, we explore *who* these climate celebrities are and *how* they function through the circulations of a Politicized Celebrity System. Second, we focus on the more recent rise of specific celebrity involvement in climate change. Here we outline prominent celebrity initiatives and endeavors, and in so doing, map out a contextualized typology of the emergent climate science–policy–celebrity complex. Third, we analyze how to make sense of this increased involvement. Drawing on a schematic from cultural studies, we look to explicitly 'add-in' celebrities to present our own model that gets at their influences on 'circulations' and 'feed backs' of news, politics, and stardom; here we stress the particular importance of thinking about this topic from both material and temporal dimensions. Fourth, we briefly explore how this climate celebrityization poses interesting and complex questions for further empirical work along two particular axes. Specifically, we introduce the idea that celebrities might just actually open up space in the public sphere and the science/policy nexus through the creation of a novel form of 'expertise' or 'authorized speakers'. Second, we suggest how the celebrity as the 'heroic individual' may entrench the focus of climate change actions through individualist frames. Overall, this paper teases apart and interrogates some of the promises, pitfalls and contradictions of celebrity involvement in the spaces of climate change. It should be seen as merely an opening salvo into further and more empirically-grounded research on celebrity, media and politics in general and celebrities and their growing fascination with environmentalism and science in particular.

## 2. Towards a Politicized Celebrity System and an initial taxonomy

Celebrity is a bit silly, but it is currency of a kind ~ Bono in *Vogue* (Singer 2002).

This lyrical quip from rock-band U2 front-man Bono alludes to the many contradictory forces shaping and being shaped by celebrity actions and commitments these days. Celebrities have broadly

been defined as those whose activities are more prominent and agency more amplified than the general population. In contemporary society, celebrities undoubtedly garner increased attention in the public purview (Marshall, 1997; Street, 2004). Through interacting media representations—television, films, books, flyers, newspapers, magazines, radio and internet<sup>2</sup>—certain personalities have become public figures and thus 'intimate strangers' (Schickel, 2000). An important and growing subset of celebrity—and the topic of this paper—involves those who have leveraged such privileged voices to raise public and policy attention to various social, political, economic, cultural and environmental issues.

Street (2004) discusses two variants of 'celebrity politicians': there are political figures who have reached celebrity status through their high-profile activities (e.g. celebrity *politicians*), and celebrities who comment on political and politicized issues, but not from elected office (e.g. *celebrity politicians*).<sup>3</sup> Focusing on the later, key features include the particular media attention as well as audience support their views can warrant, and the use of the celebrity platform to "speak out on specific causes and for particular interests with a view to influencing political outcomes" (Street, 2004, p. 438). Divergent perspectives on the roles of celebrity—analytical, descriptive and normative—have raised questions along themes of whether such activities represent democratic movements by and for 'the people' and the public realm, or rather plutocratic, unique and extra-ordinary elite behaviors of distraction.

In these mediated spaces of prominent actors moving in society, there is a long history of celebrities shaping discursive and material considerations in the public space. For instance, Braudy (1986) historicizes contemporary celebrity through considerations of 'fame' and 'recognition', and traces such movements to ancient Greek Sophists. These activities ran concurrent with the rise of organized communication arts (or Rhetoric) (Briggs and Burke, 2005), with celebrity and communications both expanding their reach through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Performance art, plays, poetry, news and debate have provided spaces from which prominent 'actors' have emerged into today's star status (Holmes and Redmond, 2006). An abridged history of celebrity involvement in environmental issues in the US, UK, Canada and Australia might draw on early popularizing work from John Muir and Aldo Leopold around ethics and conservation, as well as Rachel Carson's awareness-raising regarding toxics in the environment. Moreover, pioneering animal rights work by Brigitte Bardot against clubbing Canadian seals relates to other historically salient actions such as actor Eddie Albert's role in helping to launch the first US Earth Day in 1970. Through time there has been no dearth of celebrities making public commitments to various concerns, such as global development (e.g. U2 front-man Bono and music-promoter Bob Geldof), anti-genocide (e.g. actors Don Cheadle and George Clooney), air/toxic pollution (e.g. actress Julia Roberts), rainforest conservation (e.g. musician Gordon Sumner [Sting]), and global poverty and entitlements (e.g. actress Angelina Jolie). These efforts have raised awareness on issues and often successfully competed in the public arena for attention (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988).

For instance, in 2006 actor (and UN Goodwill Ambassador) Michael Douglas was invited to speak to British MPs about the risks of nuclear proliferation. In a House of Commons speech that followed, MP Cheryl Gillan declared, "If a visit to Parliament by Michael Douglas cannot raise the profile [of this issue] on a lasting basis,

<sup>2</sup> Media are constituted by a diverse and dynamic set of institutions, processes and practices that together serve as 'media-ting' forces between communities such as science, policy and public citizens. Members of the communications industry and profession—publishers, editors, journalists, and others—produce, interpret and communicate images, information and imaginaries for varied forms of consumption.

<sup>3</sup> Clearly with the political ascendancy of both Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger, there is also that sub-list of celebrities seeking more formal political office.

I wonder what can” (Gillan, 2000). Further illustration of the growing and somewhat obsessive fetishization with celebrity endorsers was articulated in a radio interview with Liver Foundation President Fred Thompson discussing how to popularize the concerns of the Foundation. In discussing celebrity leverage on US *National Public Radio*, host Bob Garfield asked, “Do you lay awake at night wishing that Paris Hilton will get Hepatitis B?”. Thompson replied:

“Having a celebrity or somebody like a Paris Hilton, and she happened to have liver disease and we could get her as a spokesperson; that would be probably very helpful. We all know what Katie Couric did for colon cancer. So we are hoping to find some celebrities.” (Garfield, 2007)

Through multifarious and interacting factors, the rise of politicized celebrities has been an important part of the fabric of Western society up through the present day (Turner, 2004). Yet, with this continuing and growing connection of celebrities and politics—not the least with respect to climate change—we argue there is a need to understand these forms of celebrity as a *Politicized Celebrity System* (hereafter ‘PCS’) (cf. Marshall, 2004; Cashmore, 2006; Turner, 2004). This System is characterized as a diverse field of interconnected factors and forces that importantly *circulate* in and amongst each other in and on the media landscape (Fig. 1).

In our formulation of PCS, then, are the accumulated and circulating components of:

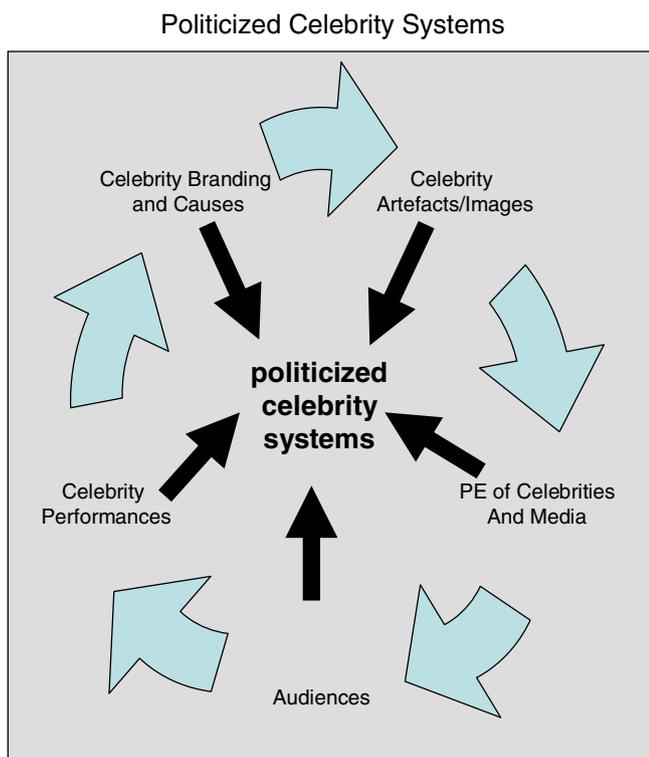
(a) *Celebrity performances*: This encapsulates the movements of celebrities in both their private and public lives, increasingly being captured by media representations. For some scholars (e.g. Debord, 1983), alienation paired with voyeuristic and unilateral communications fuels insatiable appetites of the 24/7 news cycle and predatory paparazzi. While we take up a classification system of these performances more centrally in the

next section, it is important to point out that relevant activities include the movements of a celebrity’s personal politics into the public realm and/or how a wider politics becomes personal for some as they take up particular causes (or not): in other words celebrity politics become ‘performative utterances’ (Austin 1962). These (inter)actions also include the consideration of celebrities’ own social networks that influence these activities and circulations.

(b) *Celebrity branding and causes*: This includes a range of (non)shifting identities or ‘brands’ of particular celebrities that derive out of how they have been and/or want to be ‘typecast’ or ‘framed’ in and by particular media. In the more static form, the celebrity brand develops out of, for example, the types of roles particular movie and TV stars have historically had or the genre of music that particular musicians play. Clearly, if either Bono or Chris Martin (from the UK band Coldplay) had played different kinds of music (e.g. death metal), their careers as celebrity musicians stumping for global poverty reduction and fair trade, respectively would have been perceived differently. More ephemerally, celebrity genres and media arenas dynamically construct who is ‘hot’ and who is not, thereby shaping the quantity and quality of exposure they garner with respect to political statements. At the same time, in the competitive ‘attention’ economy, causes need celebrities as a form of publicity—and equally visa versa. Celebrities need causes in order to ‘flesh out’ their brands and/or less cynically, give their personal politics a public space of exposure. This points to the potential unresolved complexities of observers ascribing to celebrity politics the motivations of mere ‘product placement’ (for both causes and celebrities) in the context of a particular campaign versus that of a more altruistic ‘ethics of care’. This is not easily reconciled in the seemingly over-determined nature of the commoditization of celebrity, yet is part of the space of celebrity politics.

(c) *Celebrity artifacts/images*: While the former points focus on discursive and celebrity processes, here the focus shifts more centrally to the iconic and material. Attention is on various technologies and media that construct celebrity performances and their brands, such as newspapers, television, movies, music, radio, magazines, and websites. For our purposes here, included are the celebrity interactions with climate change images and artifacts that have gone into constructing the public perceptions and potential engagement, such as Leonardo DiCaprio and Knut the polar bear, and Al Gore and the ‘hockey stick’ graph depicting human contributions to atmospheric temperature changes (Mann et al., 1998). Here, as Leiserowitz (2006, p. 64) has argued, “messages about climate change need to be tailored to the needs and predispositions of particular audiences; in some cases to directly challenge fundamental misconceptions, in others to resonate with strongly held values”. In various cases, connected with the other facets of the PCS, these celebrities are the ‘tailors’ Leiserowitz talks about who construct the mediated spaces by stitching together the discursive and artifactual entities of climate change in the commodity cultures of public and private consumption.

(d) *Political economies of celebrities and media*: Scaling up from the landscapes dotted with celebrity mega-stars, we incorporate the influences of the mechanisms of the various technological forms of media centered on issues of ownership, consolidation, and the perceived, constructed, and ‘real’ markets for entertainment, news, and knowledge. Media professionals and decision-makers—such as editors and journalists—operate within an often-competitive political, economic, institutional, social and cultural landscape. Like celebrities, at the end of the day, media professionals need to ‘sell’ something. Connected political economic histories of mass media,



**Fig. 1.** Politicized Celebrity Systems are dynamic and contested spaces, populated primarily by elements of celebrity performances, celebrity branding and causes, celebrity artifacts/images, political economics (PE) of celebrities and media, and audiences.

journalistic norms and values as well as power relations shape the production of news stories (Starr, 2004). For example, news is made by events and 'pseudo-events' (Boorstin, 1961), but also by the editors and editorial boards that make the decisions about what actually gets printed or seen and the processes by which this is done (Boykoff, 2007a). Therefore, the construction of meaning and discourse—while negotiated by celebrities—derive through combined structural and agential components of power, taking place simultaneously at multiple scales. Large-scale social, political and economic factors influence everyday individual decisions, such as how to focus or frame the celebrity-and-climate story in a particular instance.

(e) *Audiences*: As Marshall (1997, p. 65) states, "...the audience is central in sustaining the power of any celebrity sign" through what he calls the 'audience-subject'. Moreover, he puts it thus:

Celebrities represent subject positions that audiences can adopt or adapt in their formations of social identities. Each celebrity represents a complex form of audience-subjectivity that, when placed within a system of celebrities, provides the ground on which distinctions, differences and oppositions are played out. The celebrity, then, is an embodiment of a discursive battleground on the norms of individuality and personality within a culture. The celebrity's strength or power as a discourse on the individual is operationalized only in terms of the power and position of the audience that has allowed it to circulate. (Marshall, 1997, p. 65)

Part of the key here with celebrity political tracts is the reception of the audience to this political posturing and their level and depth of knowledge of the subject. Also important here is how the audience takes these discourses and seeks to actualize them (or not) into material, economic, or political 'outcomes' such as altered behaviors, beliefs or values.

Thus, to sum up across the five interconnected factors, processes and forces that comprise the PCS, power, voice and the 'spaces' of celebrities are determined by a "mediated deliberation" (Barnett, 2004) of all of these characteristics. These feed back into ongoing dynamic and contested relationships and circulations of the celebrity as well as the messages the celebrities communicate through time. It is from here that we examine the rise of celebrity involvement in climate change in this system as well as examine their various types of engagements and interactions.

### 3. I am a celebrity, hear me roar: Counting and categorizing climate change celebrities

Climate change—a subset of global environmental change—has grown to be a prominent concern to a wide array of interests. Among them is this privileged community of celebrity voices. Celebrity involvement in climate change-related endeavors has grown over the last 20 years. So while discourse on climate change generally has gained more traction in the public domain, celebrity involvement in this critical issue has also been on the rise. From musical groups promoting 'carbon neutral' tours (e.g. *Pearl Jam* and *Coldplay*), to actors narrating global warming feature films (e.g. Leonardo DiCaprio's *The 11th Hour*), high-profile personalities have undertaken efforts to publicly express concerns about human contributions to climate change. Simultaneously, celebrity 'actors' are at the center of the public debates over the variety and extent of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. For example, it has been argued that *An Inconvenient Truth* catalyzed shifts in public understanding, as well as the wider politics of climate change (Boykoff, 2007b). In reflecting on this emerging celebrity role, Laurie David—a producer of *An Inconvenient Truth* and a US-based climate special *Too Hot Not to Handle* (among her many related projects)—has said, "Environmental communicators are

too cautious. I throw caution into the wind. Once people learn what global warming means, they start to pay attention" (Vergano, 2006).

In the late 1980s, concerns regarding climate change sources and impacts burst onto the public scene via mass media (Carvalho and Burgess, 2005; Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007). A number of key factors contributed to this rise in awareness, particularly beginning in 1988. Among them was NASA scientist James Hansen's testimony to the US Congress in the summer of 1988 (Shabecoff, 1988). Also, in the UK, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher spoke to the Royal Society in what became known as her 'green speech' on the dangers of climate change. These high-profile interventions-turned-spectacles generated substantial attention and became emblems for newfound public concern on the issue. Further increasing coverage in 1988 was due to major heat waves and droughts that spread across Canada and the US that summer, the creation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and an international conference called 'The Changing Atmosphere' sponsored by UNEP and WMO bringing together national governments including the US, UK, Australia and Canada. All combined, these events garnered increased media attention to the issue of climate change (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007).

Yet, today, such attention has also very much extended to coverage of celebrities and climate change. Here, following Brudy (1986) and Evans and Hesmondhalgh (2005), media coverage can be considered a useful proxy for celebrity influence on the discourses and media politics of climate change. As Fig. 2 shows, with other increases in coverage, including 1997's Kyoto Protocol coverage and that in 2000 with Al Gore's run for US President, a dramatic rise in celebrity involvement can be noted in 2005 and 2006.

Beyond daily print media, emergent 'green issues' or 'special issues' in *Vanity Fair*, *Rolling Stone*, the *Nation*, *Newsweek* and *Time* as well as 'special reports' across numerous broadcast television and radio channels also 'signal' this recent increase in media coverage of celebrities and climate change. Thus, while polar bears and melting glaciers have reportedly occupied the imaginations of the public minds in the issue of climate change (Leiserowitz,

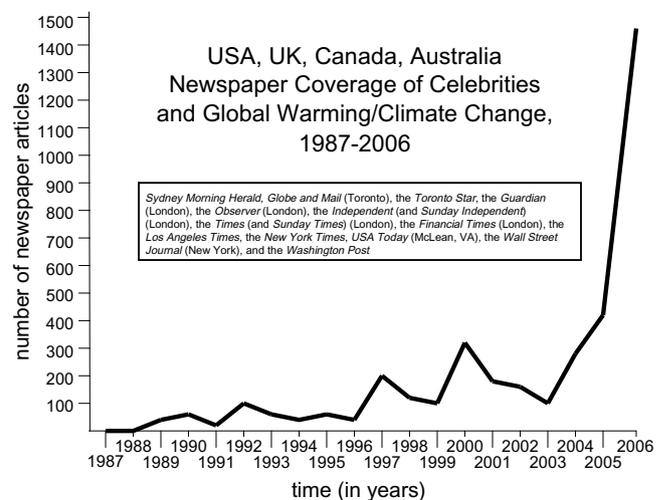


Fig. 2. This study tracks celebrity involvement in climate change through US, UK, Canadian and Australian newspaper coverage since 1987. This was conducted using the Lexis/Nexis search engine with the following Boolean keyword search: global warming or climate change and Hollywood or Al Gore or Angelina Jolie or Brad Pitt or David Beckham or Bob Geldof or Gordon Sumner or Sting or Didier Drogba or Nicole Kidman or Ronaldinho or Johnnie Depp or Gwyneth Paltrow or George Clooney or Salma Hayek or Kofi Annan or Nelson Mandela or Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. or Leonardo DiCaprio or Cameron Diaz or Keanu Reeves or Alanis Morissette or Chris Martin or Bono or Richard Branson or Arnold Schwarzenegger or Chris Martin or Robert Redford or Laurie David.

## POLAR MELTDOWN NOT SO COOL



**Orlando Bloom (left, with Keira Knightley) – whose *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* took \$401 million globally on its opening weekend—swapped pirate clobber for thermal clothing when he travelled to Antarctica to see the damage global warming is wreaking. Committed environmentalist Bloom said: “I saw how tragically fragile the ice caps are.”**

Fig. 3. This image and its accompanying text (Anon, 2007) is a rather vivid example of the growing confluence of the celebrity spectacle, climate change and politics.

2006; Slocum, 2004, celebrities have become a new form of ‘charismatic megafauna’ as a heterogeneous and important community of non-nation-state actors that have increasingly acted to influence various facets of the science–policy–public interface over the last two decades.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time as this general trend, there are numerous specific and recent illustrations of not only the growth of celebrity voices in relation to climate change, but also how this has quickly turned climate change and its associated science into new forms of spectacle. For instance, nestled in the May 29 (Anon, 2007) edition of *The London Paper*,<sup>5</sup> in the paper’s ‘Green Watch’ feature, a film still (Fig. 3) appeared with Orlando Bloom and Keira Knightley from *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* with the headline ‘Polar Meltdown Not So Cool’.

The caption reads thus:

Orlando Bloom (left, with Keira Knightley)—whose *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* took \$401 million globally on

its opening weekend—swapped pirate clobber for thermal clothing when he traveled to Antarctica to see the damage global warming is wreaking. Committed environmentalist Bloom said: “I saw how tragically fragile the ice caps are”.

Thus, the spectacle-ization of climate change seems (al)most complete, with a ‘polar meltdown’ playing invisible stagehand to the ‘melting’ powers of two of the most powerful ‘celeb-rated’ bodies of Bloom and Knightley.

And, yet, not all celebrities are created nor treated as equal. Thus, even if *Pop Idol* or *American Idol* were the requisite routes for the achievement of ‘celebrity’ status, departures from ideals of meritocracy and participatory democracy become readily apparent even in the PCS. A 2007 AC Nielsen and University of Oxford online poll<sup>6</sup> including respondents in the US, UK, Canada and Australia suggested that specific celebrities have garnered particular

<sup>4</sup> See Newell (2000) and McCright and Dunlap (2003) for discussions of other non-nation-state actors such as carbon-based industries, businesses, environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) and contrarians and the important need to include them in discussions of the politics of climate change.

<sup>5</sup> This is a free city tabloid with high informal circulation among the millions of commuters to and through London.

<sup>6</sup> The question posed to respondents was, ‘Who would be most influential person/people to champion the efforts to combat global warming/climate change?’ and respondents were able to select three from a list of 22 celebrities: Al Gore, Angelina Jolie, David Beckham, Bob Geldof, Bono, Bill Clinton, Didier Drogba, Nicole Kidman, Sting, Ronaldinho, Johnnie Depp, Gwyneth Paltrow, Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan, George Clooney, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Leonardo DiCaprio, Richard Branson, Salma Hayek, John Terry, Oprah Winfrey, and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

**Table 1**  
Ten influential 'Celebrity Champions for Climate Change'

	Total	Australia	Canada	UK	US
Al Gore	23%	28%	24%	12%	30%
Oprah Winfrey	20%	23%	22%	7%	28%
Bill Clinton	16%	12%	21%	13%	17%
Bono	12%	14%	15%	7%	10%
Richard Branson	12%	20%	1%	23%	2%
Nelson Mandela	11%	15%	10%	14%	5%
Arnold Schwarzenegger	9%	6%	11%	9%	11%
Bob Geldof	8%	12%	1%	18%	1%
Kofi Annan	7%	8%	6%	10%	3%
Angelina Jolie	6%	5%	9%	5%	6%

This internet survey was taken in May of 2007. The question posed was 'Who would be most influential person/people to champion the efforts to combat global warming/climate change?' and respondents were able to select three from a list of 22 celebrities. The total number of respondents in these countries was 3031 (AC Nielsen, 2007).

discursive sway, and thus possess the power to mobilize 'regional' resources with respect to climate change action.<sup>7</sup> These 'celebrities' include, Oprah Winfrey, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Nelson Mandela, Bono and Richard Branson who were among the ten most influential in championing efforts to combat global warming/climate change (Table 1) (AC Nielsen, 2007).

Al Gore and Oprah Winfrey were deemed most influential overall in these four countries. However, there appeared to be distinct age, gender and geographical differences in selections. For instance, Sir Richard Branson and Bob Geldof polled first and second in the UK, garnering 23% and 18% of votes, respectively. However, UK women chose Geldof more frequently than Branson, while people under the age of 20 most frequently selected David Beckham and Johnny Depp. In Australia, Al Gore (28%) and Oprah Winfrey (23%) generated the highest percentage of votes. However, Bono generated 20% of selections by those under 40 while Bob Geldof generated more votes by people over 40 (16%). In both the United States and Canada, while Gore and Winfrey polled consistently high, females selected Oprah Winfrey nearly twice as frequently as males (AC Nielsen, 2007). While these data can be revealing, they do not delve into nuanced analyses of who is doing what for/with climate change in terms of celebrities' politics. Amidst this swirl of multi-country spread-sheets, the greatest contribution of the survey is that it is yet another vantage point from which to consider celebrity involvement in climate change.

To this end, we build from the quantity of celebrity-and-climate-change coverage in the media and the polling figures, as well as the development of PCS in the previous section, in order to approximate a situated 'taxonomy' of climate change celebrities and their effects. While we emphasize the need to contextualize celebrity involvement in climate change across time and space, analyses are less effective when 'celebrity' is treated as an essentialized or homogeneous construct. Thus, depending on how broadly one defines 'celebrity' as well as what may constitute a climate change-related cause, a list of 'actors' to classify could grow into the many hundreds. Therefore, in working through this taxonomy, we chose a sample of 'stars' to illustrate the *primary* spaces they are carving out for themselves and the issue of climate change via the media.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the preoccupation is not over the activities of *particular* celebrities, but rather how these examples help

<sup>7</sup> One of the paper's authors was involved in this project with AC Nielsen to gauge public sentiment for possible 'celebrity climate champions'. This was a survey of 26,486 internet users taken in May 2007 across 47-countries in North America, Europe, Asia Pacific and the Middle East.

<sup>8</sup> We emphasize *primary* here, as these categories are far from mutually exclusive, as indicated by how particular actors can navigate between these categories at different times.

illustrate the *concept* of celebrity, and the significance of celebrity involvement with climate change and the environment over time. With this classification, however, we do not intend to de-emphasize the multifaceted roles of media and audience translation and consumption as also thoroughly constituting the celebrity space; rather, we intend to situate this focus within the dynamic and contested spaces of the aforementioned PCS that makes up the larger landscape. While the five elements of the System mapped out in the preceding section are all influential, here we focus more carefully on the first two factors: celebrity performances as well as celebrity branding and causes.

This classification follows on a history of taxonomies that have been developed mainly from cultural studies. As mentioned before, Street (2004) developed a distinction between celebrity *politicians* and *celebrity* politicians. Also with a focus on politics, West and Orman (2002) have developed a taxonomy by distinctions between various cases of celebrity attribution (e.g. birthrights) and achievement (e.g. athletic achievement). Other taxonomies have focused on the power and influence these celebrities mobilize (e.g. Alberoni, 1972), or the meanings generated by the nature of the 'spectacular' achievement or contribution (e.g. Monaco, 1978; Rojek, 2001). While these factors remain relevant, we primarily define these actors by the political or social determinants that shape their actions. We also focus on deliberate interventions in this case of climate change, as this particularly politicized scientific issue makes perceptions of the messengers a driving force in the reception of the circulating messages themselves. Thus, there are six main types of climate change celebrities:

(1) *Celebrity actors*: There is a rapidly increasing range of contributions from this type of celebrity. A more prominent intervention has been that of A-list actor Leonardo DiCaprio, who in 2007 released a documentary feature film entitled *The 11th Hour*, which examines global environmental degradation with a focus on climate change. At the 2007 Cannes Film Festival, DiCaprio also made a high-profile declaration that, "I try as often as possible to fly commercially" (Higgins, 2007, p. 15).<sup>9</sup> Operating at a lower profile has been the much esteemed big-screen actor Robert Redford, who has campaigned for environmental causes for many decades, and more recently climate change. He has hosted meetings at his ranch in Utah in support of efforts to coordinate the US Mayors' Climate Protection agreement where leaders pledge to develop policy to meet targets and timetables of the Kyoto Protocol in their cities.

(2) *Celebrity politicians*: Related to the former type, Greg Nichols—Mayor of Seattle (Washington) USA—has become somewhat of a celebrity for leading this US Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement. Through this work, he has inspired over 400 US cities and states, as well as other locations around the world to take similar actions. Yet, the quintessential embodiment of this type of 'actor', however, is Arnold Schwarzenegger, who in recent years has primarily contributed to this issue through his role as the elected Governor of the State of California. Among his many activities, in June 2005 he issued an executive order for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to 2000 levels by 2010, 1990 levels by 2020, and 80% below 1990 by 2050 (Eilperin, 2005). Actions such as these have reconfigured discussions of energy production and distribution in the US, and have prompted headlines that drew on his celebrity 'action hero' status such as 'Arnie: Let's Terminate Global Warming' (Anon, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps DiCaprio meant instead to say, "I try to fly commercially as often as possible", though the mixed sentence structure does provide insight into the lurking contradictions of conspicuous consumption patterns (and possible part-time guilt) associated with the problems surrounding anthropogenic climate change.

(3) *Celebrity athletes/sports figures*: Increasingly, celebrity athletes and sports figures as well as the journalists who cover them have been addressing this issue. Such involvement was reflected in a March 2007 *Sports Illustrated* cover story entitled 'Sports and Global Warming: As the Planet Changes, So Do the Games We Play—Time to Pay Attention' (Wolff, 2007). Moreover, Former England and current Portsmouth FC goalkeeper David James has been speaking out consistently about carbon footprints and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transport and renewable energy; his widest forum was in a *Guardian* opinion piece in December 2006 (James, 2006). Also, Manchester United FC manager Sir Alex Ferguson garnered a wave of media attention when he took part in a March 2007 'training' with Al Gore on global warming (Adam, 2007).

(4) *Celebrity business people*: More business actors are moving into the arenas of high-profile investments and commitments to climate change-related issues. For instance, in September of 2006 Virgin CEO Richard Branson made a much publicized 'donation' of three billion dollars to renewable energy initiatives and biofuel research. This personalized story was widely reported and hailed as a philanthropic act and then critiqued as the funds were to be invested in Virgin Fuels rather than donated to another organization (Milmo and Adam, 2006; Prudham, in press). Also here we place the aforementioned Laurie David, former talent coordinator for the David Letterman talk show. She has been a driving force in shifting climate change from a science and policy issue to a cultural issue, as she has worked with a number of celebrities on these issues, founded the *Stop Global Warming Virtual March*<sup>10</sup> campaign with Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and US Senator John McCain, and has helped coordinate many concert, television and print specials. She has succinctly commented in various fora that her goal is "to infiltrate popular culture" (Brancaccio, 2007).

(5) *Celebrity musicians*: For a long time now, musicians have placed politics in the vocal center of their commitments. More recently, these commitments have shifted to the issue of climate change. For instance, the group Pearl Jam has donated US\$100,000 to groups working on climate change and renewable technologies, popular singer Alanis Morissette co-narrated (with actor Keanu Reeves) the feature film *The Great Warming* in 2006, and in 2007 singer Sheryl Crow did a US university tour (with Laurie David) raising awareness on the issue. Involvement has not been without its critiques: lead singer Thom Yorke from Radiohead has pointed to the 'hypocrisy' of such involvement given the environmental impacts of worldwide rock tours (Hickman, 2006), a refrain similarly heard in response to Live Earth. Also, musical group Coldplay sought to 'offset' the production of their 2006 album *A Rush of Blood to the Head* by financing reforestation projects in India,<sup>11</sup> though the *Sunday Telegraph* revealed that only a fraction of the planted trees had survived to effectively remove CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere (Dhillon and Harden, 2006).

(6) *Celebrity public intellectuals and figures*: This kind of intervention is comprised of a number of privileged voices, from UK journalist George Monbiot to the more 'contrarian' voices of the US right-wing radio talk show personality Rush Limbaugh and author Michael Crichton. Such are these amplified voices that in this politicized climate change issue, they are routinely called on for comment. For instance, an *NBC Nightly News* report in 2002 began a piece on climate change by covering a state-

ment by US president George Bush that warming might be due to anthropogenic causes. However, the news story then counterbalanced Bush's statement with quotes from conservative commentator Limbaugh (Hager, 2002). This type of celebrity also accounts for the high-profile actions of former US Vice-president Al Gore. While his previous contributions came from the spaces of the 'celebrity politician', his primary role in more recent climate change work comes as a public intellectual. The current work of former US President Bill Clinton on the 'Clinton Climate Initiative' to tackle GHG emission from the world's 40 largest cities also primarily emanates from this sphere of influence.

Our initial taxonomy, presented as it has been above, along with the discussion of the PCS, endeavors to provide a foundation for more nuanced analyses of cultural factors shaping climate change discourse and action among non-nation-state actors and at the science-media-policy interface. This leads to our last two sections where we incorporate a more explicit temporal dimension to climate change celebrity politics and draw on recent work in commodity cultures to 'materialize' a bit more these cultural circuits of celebrities in the PCS.

#### 4. Conceptualizing the political 'stuff' of stardom

##### 4.1. *The Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities*

The question thus becomes the following: How do we more fruitfully understand and conceptualize celebrities, media and climate change politics and their potential effects at the same time giving this phenomenon a more relationally-informed register? What we propose here then is a model from which to understand, analyze, and conceptualize the actions and politics of celebrities but also their effects in wider society. The model we are suggesting—what we call the *Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities*—contributes to recent statements in work on celebrity and media-politics. As Drake and Higgins (2006, pp. 99–100) assert, "an analysis of the relationship between celebrity and politics needs to take into account the particular celebrity, the mode of performance they adopt, their earlier image, and the political claims that they make". Moreover, Street argues that, "the claim by celebrities to speak for others is conditional... (it) extends to the larger social and political context in which they operate" (2004, 449). Accounting for these contextual and temporal dimensions helps to better understand the particular culturally-, materially-, and geographically-informed situation of climate change celebrity political activities.

At the same time, we consider this model in terms of the effects of the celebrityization of climate change. Previous debates in media and cultural studies on the effects of the media-ization of society and politics can be seen as situating celebrity-style politics into two readily apparent dueling and dualistic camps. On the one hand, there is the 'distraction' camp, which argues that this celebrityization of climate change is nothing but that: a deception that pulls attention away from the 'real' issues and politics of climate change (e.g. Weiskel, 2005). Thus, as we are so distracted by the realms of consumption and aesthetics—so the argument goes—the revolution will not happen, let alone allow the development of self-consciousness as the 'public' is all too happy to dispense with democratic and/or more crude forms of power in the spaces of entertainment (cf. Barnett, 2004). On the other hand, there is the 'democratization' camp which celebrates the media-ization of politics as a new tool to fire up the imaginations of the public and increase participation and political discussion to foster civil society (e.g. Corner and Pels, 2003; Street, 2004). Through the PCS, we attempt to grapple with these competing views by arguing that the effects of climate change celebrities are contingent and

<sup>10</sup> This 'March' has been undertaken through [www.stopglobalwarming.org](http://www.stopglobalwarming.org).

<sup>11</sup> Through Carbon Neutral Company, fans could pay \$25 for a certificate saying they offset in 'The Coldplay Forest' in Karnataka, India where 10,000 mango trees were planted.

situational, based both on the characteristics of the PCS but also the temporal and media-mediated responses of audiences. Thus, for us, climate change celebrities here might be, *in some instances*, the figures representing a new era of thoroughly media-mediated politics that open up space for the politicization of the public; this would be a widening of participation and a more relevant form of political communication perpetrated *through* the processes of distraction (e.g. celebrities). Or, *in other instances*, audience engagement with celebrity politics might simply be about distraction and entertainment instead of novel forms of political and scientific communication as here with climate change.

So, in some ways, the PCS does not go far enough to consider the movement and circulation of celebrity politics on the wider media landscape; it is, thus, a useful place to start in order to understand part of what makes up the 'climate' of celebrity politics. Indeed, the PCS does not enable an engagement or understanding of how celebrity politics are produced, consumed and reflected/refracted on the media landscape and, importantly the temporal dimensions of these relationalities. Rather, the PCS is nested within and constructs part of what we have called here the *Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities*.

Our model draws on that of the 'circuits of culture' developed in cultural studies (e.g. Johnson, 1986; Du Gay, 1997) which works to understand the ways in which meaning and knowledge are derived through semiotic processes of encoding and decoding both images and texts. Thus, many different kinds of multi-scale contextual factors contribute to the variances in the effectiveness of a *particular celebrity activity*, from the contemporary political landscape and media norms and pressures to cultural influences and institutional factors. Assembled in various ways over time the circuits of culture work have sought to account for the dynamic spaces within which cultural texts and images are constructed and maintained in both public and private spaces of culture and society.

More relevantly, Carvalho and Burgess (2005) (see also Burgess, 1990, 2005) have developed a variation on this cultural circuits theme in order to understand the specific communication of climate risk via UK newspaper reporting. For them, delineated in this work are three interacting 'moments' of (1) news production, (2) public discourse/media consumption, and (3) personal interpretations of climate risk. These feed back into reproducing cycles over time, contingent upon reflection as well as changing conditions. In the first phase, multifarious factors—from economic pressures to journalistic norms—shape the production of news about climate risk. In the second phase, these news stories compete with other issues for public attention and the priorities of policy actors. The third phase moves into the private sphere to account for how citizens understand, engage with or resist communicated interpretations of climate risk. This is a valuable contribution in that it emphasizes contested agency of citizens in both the public and private spheres as well as the factors that bound possibilities. Moreover, it accounts for the social learning component both within scientific knowledge and public understanding in shaping ongoing and dynamic spaces of media-mediated interactions.

For our purposes, we have developed the Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities model in order to focus the analytical framework on the privileged spaces of interaction that are uniquely gained by one's celebrity status. Again, through the amplified agency and 'currency' of their prominent status in contemporary society, celebrities garner exceptional attention in public as well as private spaces of engagement at all of the three moments in Carvalho and Burgess' (2005) representation (cf. Marshall, 1997; Street, 2004). Fig. 1 has portrayed the dynamic interactions that comprise the PCS, and situating this *within* the dynamism of Carvalho and Burgess' take then portrays this 'celebrity effect' through time and space as represented in Fig. 4.

For example, the 7 July, 2007 Live Earth 24-hour concert<sup>12</sup> has influenced cultural perceptions of climate change—specifically through celebrity involvement—at all of these phases in the model in various ways: 'news' was produced in advance, during and after the event through media coverage and advertising; public attention was garnered and awareness was arguably raised through interlocking factors; and people incorporated or resisted the 7-point pledge messaging that peppered the event. More generally, numerous cultural events, images and artifacts continue to compete for attention and normatively guide attitudinal and behavioral responses across space and time. Driven also by factors such as political economics of mass media and audience reception, the messengers also shift, through changing performances, images and brands.

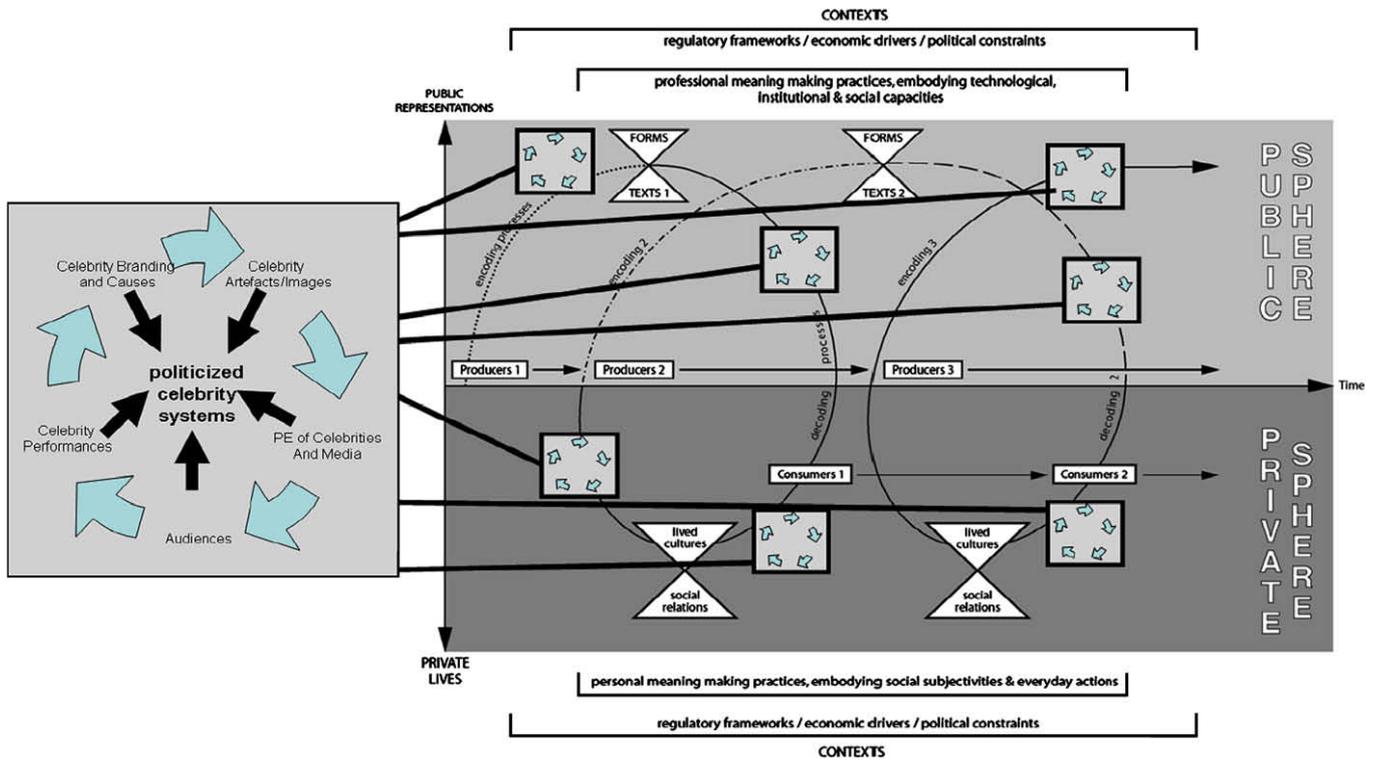
Moving through this model and also influencing the PCS are the dynamic elements of *framing*, which are manifest in multifarious ways. A key function of mass media coverage of celebrity involvement in climate change has been to 'frame' their movements. In general, actants—both individuals and collective—seek to access and utilize mass media sources in order to shape perceptions of environmental issues contingent on their perspectives and interests (Nisbet and Mooney, 2007). Framing is an inherent part of cognition, employed to contextualize and organize issues, events and occurrences and define them in ways that privilege certain discourses, interpretations and understandings over others (Goffman, 1974). It involves an inevitable series of choices to cover certain events within a larger current of dynamic activities. Asymmetrical influences—precisely celebrity interventions—feed back into cultural circuits that further shape emergent frames of 'news', knowledge and discourse as in the third moment of our model. Emphases on 'controversy' and 'negotiation' in this model demonstrate the intensely politicized spaces these media-politics interactions occupy in the process of framing. Such considerations thus provide a window into principles and assumptions underlying framing of representations of environmental issues and politics. According to Forsyth, examinations of particular framings provide an opportunity to question "how, when, and by whom such terms were developed as a substitute for reality" (Forsyth, 2003, p. 81).

Permeating these interactions are lurking still some important questions regarding the fleeting nature of celebrities and that of climate change discourse in previous cultural studies work on these topics. It is to this set of considerations and how we see our model acting as a corrective to this ephemerality that we now turn.

#### 4.2. (Re)materialized commodities in the Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities

We argue that previous treatments of celebrity and also climate change-media circuits have lacked a sense of the *materialized* nature of these phenomena. To this end, we signal the thorough entrenchment of a 'commodity culture' (e.g. Jackson, 1999, 2002) in the Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities as one way to capture the materiality of celebrity-ness in its 'body politics' and commodity 'status', but also the sorts of material artifacts that flow from celebrities in the form of politicized consumer choices for, for example, the purchase of a hybrid car by the celebrities or a particular 'fan'.

<sup>12</sup> These concerts took place in Australia, Brazil, China, Germany, Japan, South Africa, United Kingdom, and United States, and involve a long list of mega-star musicians, including Madonna, Shakira, Black Eyed Peas, Metallica, KT Turnstall, The Police, Alicia Keys, Jack Johnson, Macy Gray, Eason Chan, Huang Xiao Ming, Enrique Iglesias, Foo Fighters, Snoop Dog, Mana, Linkin Park, Joss Stone, UB40, Anthony Wong, Beastie Boys, Duran Duran, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Bon Jovi, Kanye West, Kelly Clarkson, Genesis, Razorlight, John Mayer, Ludacris, Smashing Pumpkins and Melissa Etheridge.



**Fig. 4.** The Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities. This figure is a graphic representation of the ‘celebrity effect’ on the communication of climate change over space and time. It is composed of the original figure from Carvalho and Burgess (2005, 1459 Fig. 1; reproduced with permission) that represents the media-generated cultural circuits of climate change to which we add-in the PCS because of the important and growing presence of politicized celebrities. Through this new figure, we suggest that at each of the three moments in these media-ated cultural circuits (encoding/news production, public discourse/media consumption, and decoding/personal interpretations of climate risk), celebrities, their voices and their embodiments of climate change discourse, science, and politics play a central and relational role in climate change communication and its framing.

That celebrity and celebrities are commodities has not been lost of ‘fame’ scholars. As Turner (2004, p. 9) states, “celebrity is not only a discursive effect. The celebrity is also a commodity: produced, traded and marketed by the media and publicity industries. In this context, celebrity’s primary function is commercial and promotional” to which we would add, also political. But what does this actually mean in the context of our model as well as for celebrities and politics more generally? Several points stand out here.

First, if celebrity/celebrities is/are commodities, then in this form, these are commodities and politics *made flesh*—and *visa versa*—in the individualized bodies and bodily performances of the famous, which have some implications as described further below. In short, in important ways, celebrities become the virtual and real embodiments of climate change politics.

Second, in keeping with the commodity-status of celebrity, it then becomes interesting to think about the sorts of ‘values’—exchange, use, and sign—that inhabit celebrities and contribute to their connections to climate change politics. The sign value of celebrity here seems quite clear, as a way to raise the awareness of the problems of climate change, with the exchange value of celebrity a bit more tangential but perhaps in the knock-on effect of selling more green technologies or changing consumers’/societies behaviors. The use value of celebrity seems a bit more straightforward, and, in a reconstruction of the previous quote from Bono, the value of celebrity here is as that amplified voice that can act as a form of cultural ‘currency’ to garner attention about climate change.

Third, the other commodities that need to be considered in our model are those that are engaged with as a result of the politicized statements and activities of celebrities: those green goods, such as hybrid cars and energy-efficient light-bulbs, which are (potentially) consumed by celebrities’ audiences. In no small way, celebrities are also, as Hobson (2006) puts it, becoming flesh- and

performance-based ‘tools’ for ‘eco-modernization’ through their often continual hype for switching off lights, buying hybrid cars (which clearly involves emulation of the celebrities), and using other green technological and consumer-oriented schemes for dealing with climate change.

Finally, this last point signals a wider argument about consumption and the politics of consumption in the Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities. Here we would suggest, consumption is thoroughly *de-differentiated* (Bryman, 2004) in that it becomes increasingly unclear what is actually being consumed as it is thoroughly media-ated: is it the celebrity, their ‘image’, their politics, the green goods they are promoting, or some combination? In some ways, the more important question is about *how* this all matters as—from a thoroughly reformist perspective—might the answer be that it really *does not matter* as long as less CO<sub>2</sub> is being pumped into the atmosphere somehow?

**5. Icons and their effects: The cultural politics of climate change celebrities**

On its face, it might be argued that prominent figures from the entertainment industry have indeed contributed substantially to enhance public understanding of climate change causes and consequences, and significantly shape ongoing dynamics in climate policy and politics. In the least, this can be seen in some of the data presented above showing the increase in the coverage of celebrities connected to climate change in various media outlets.

However, there are possible pitfalls as well in both discursive and material spaces, where increased associations reduce proposed critical behavioral changes to the domain of fashion and fad rather than influence substantive long-term shifts in popular discourse and action. Taking up this more questioning (and critical) lens,

do these efforts trivialize behavioral change and coddle ongoing consumerism? Or do these endeavors serve to enroll a new set of 'actors' by mobilizing audiences and fan bases that otherwise would not find interest in climate change mitigation or adaptation? Moreover, celebrity commitments have raised multi-scale questions. For instance, do many celebrity initiatives reframe actions through a focus on 'individual heroism' (such as changing one's light bulb or buying a hybrid automobile to 'save' the planet)? In other words, by reframing these politicized spaces with the focus on extra-ordinary personal action, opportunities are opened to isolate or dismiss efforts as those of the 'liberal Hollywood elites' who are simply after 'brand' extension through the environmental cultural politics of 'conspicuous redemption'.<sup>13</sup> By the very act of making it personal in the bodies and discourses of celebrities, it makes it personal: *ad hominem* attacks and 'character assassinations' become more possible in the spaces of the 'celebrated' individual. On the other hand, it could be precisely this heroism and championing that is needed to pioneer new-millennium reflexivity, usher in multiple-scale meaningful change and inspire emergent movements. Overall, considering these dynamic, contested and increasingly important influences together, developments over the last two decades have given rise to emergent 'climate science-policy-celebrity complex', prompting the question, is it more effective to 'plant' celebrities instead of trees?<sup>14</sup>

Stemming from the questions we have put forward, many of which get at the sort of ambivalences that arise with the insertion of celebrities into climate change politics, there are two specific areas in need of further critical consideration in the context of the Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities.

First, interacting in the spaces of this climate science-policy-celebrity complex, the boundaries between who constitutes 'authorized' speakers (and who are not) are negotiated and challenged (Gieryn, 1999; Eden et al., 2006). In a study of waste disposal and 'upstream' engagement, Eden et al. (2006, p. 1075) speak of the value in the blurring of these boundaries of expertise and authority, as "collective, negotiated, and heterogeneous knowledge production and validation is not merely about extending notions of expertise but extending ways of working across, within, and outside science-policy boundaries". Is there also this added value to have celebrity stakeholder voices in this global issue? In terms of media representations, evidence shows that celebrity as a *different* form of 'authority' has become more pervasive, and this suggests that the privileged voices of celebrity actors have gained greater influence in the framing of climate science-policy/practice discourses via mass media. Indeed, this assertion is consistent with other voices in the climate science-policy arena: Asher Minns, Communications Director for the Tyndall Centre for Climate Research, states that "climate change has grown from an occasional nerdy science story or doomsday headline to being about politics, money and power" (Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, 2006).

Yet, can we assess how these 'actors' may increasingly shape the architectures of possible climate change actions? The anecdotal as well as empirical evidence here suggests a possible 'opening up' of different—albeit 'star-struck'—spaces for engagement in climate science and policy arenas. In his book *Risk Society*, Beck called for more non-nation-state actor/public engagement with environmen-

tal politics and science (or 'upstream engagement') in order to more properly account for and deal with the contested spaces—both public and private—therein (Beck, 1992). Could the celebrity/climate change connection be a welcome or a dangerous sign of things to come?

From another view, Boorstin provides a specifically pessimistic view of celebrity involvement. From a cultural history perspective, he has argued that such celebrity representations have generated 'pseudo-events', and in other words, fabricated and superficial representations of reality (Boorstin, 1961). It is through these increasingly visible spaces that climate change-related contradictions become more conspicuous and perhaps more 'branded'. Similarly, the work of Horkheimer and Adorno (1944, 1947)—recalling some of the characterizations of celebrity involvement coming out of cultural studies mentioned above—highlights writings from critical and social theory that have considered the attraction to these privileged voices as a facet of the 'culture industry'. This research has provided intriguing insights on the dangers and negative impacts of instrumentalization, homogenization, commodification and reification within the structures and processes of late capitalism, of which celebrity environmentalism might very well be a symptom. Thus, working through these questions, the PCS and our model, we have arrived at a place of contextualized social constructivism, from which to examine the relational aspects of these variegated engagements.

Our second concern involves how the celebrity as the 'heroic individual' seeking conspicuous redemption may focus climate change actions through exceedingly 'individualist' frames. Through the entrenchment of discourses in the PCS as situated in the Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities, it is individualized conspicuous redemption that becomes the glorified and righteous path to decarbonization. Put into the language of Donna Haraway (Haraway, 1997), this characterization might read as 'relational\_reflexivity@new.millennium.meets\_atomized' (and heroic/fictitious™) individualism'. In other words, celebrity roles in these spaces are viewed as the high-profile 'heroes' that effectively cements individualization and the neoliberal project while purporting and aiming to do otherwise (Marshall, 1997; see also Turner, 2004). Consequently, 'green' consumer behaviors—such as recycling and the purchase of carbon 'offsets'—might serve as a misguided yet palliative balm to soothe our collective consciousness, embedded still in largely capitalist and modernist frameworks. Despite some claims that such 'greening' activities point to greater reflexivity, a number of scholars have raised the question, 'what does reflexivity really get us?' (e.g. Giddens, 1991; Haraway, 1997). Littler (2005, p. 244) has drawn from Giddens to examine how the "paradigm of reflexivity tends to foreground atomized and intensely individualized forms of sociality, from which 'reflexivity' can offer itself up to be understood as a relatively bounded form of narcissistic individualism". Ultimately, the danger in this celebrity path to conspicuous redemption *for everyone else* has been that it has further distracted and muffled the articulations of discourses calling on systemic and large-scale political, economic, social and cultural shifts that will likely be necessary to address the multifarious problems and difficult choices associated with modern global climate change.<sup>15</sup>

## 6. Conclusion: The show must go on

Debord's (1983) *Society of the Spectacle* focuses on the spaces of 'perfected' separation between signifier and signified in the battle-

<sup>13</sup> This reframing intersects with Ereat and Segnit (2006, p. 23) work on climate discourses, particularly the 'linguistic repertoires' of 'small actions' and 'David and Goliath' where individual actions are emphasized as ways to grapple with climate change causes and consequences. They assert that these repertoires often emanate from press accounts and "leftist campaign communications".

<sup>14</sup> Contra the comments of one of our reviewers, we mean this figuratively, to capture the range of potentially effective activities emerging from celebrity involvement, from raising public awareness and social movements to forcing policy changes and reducing atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>.

<sup>15</sup> 'Modern global climate change' here signifies human influence on the global climate, increasingly recognized through detection and attribution studies, also noted in the 2003 *Science* article by Karl and Trenberth (2003).

fields of modernity. He analyzes how the contradictions within the individual feel as though they become reconciled through the alienating processes of media imagery. As a result, Debord argues, “the real consumer becomes a consumer of illusions. The commodity is the factually real illusion, and the spectacle is its general manifestation” (Debord, 1983, p. 47). These dangers seem readily apparent through the performances, artifacts, brands and images in the case of the ‘celebritization’ of climate change across time and space. Amid these circulations, through our analyses here of newspaper and other media representations of climate science and the various embodiments of celebrity personalities, we have explored what celebrity voices in climate change science and policy might mean for how we understand the current terrain of climate politics in the expanding networked landscapes of science, policy and media. In working through the multifarious factors that comprise a Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities model, we have situated celebrities—in the form of the PCS—as an emergent and important set of ‘extended networks’ that is shaping meaning and knowledge at the science–policy/practice interface. By potentially blurring the lines as ‘authorized’ speakers, this group of embodied ‘actors’ has leveraged links between environmental science and policy actors and institutions.

This paper has sought to make sense of these activities and their expressions and has situated questions within unfolding activities in the carbon economy. And yet, these climate science–policy–celebrity arenas are highly contested, characterized by uncertain facts, disputed values and politicized alternatives for action, and the stakes and tensions will continue to grow as time goes on. It will be up to future work to examine in more detail the effects of these ‘familiar strangers’ (Gitlin, 2001) on the post-normal (climate) science landscapes (Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1990) of contemporary society.

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