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**'CHARISMATIC MEGAFUNA': THE GROWING POWER OF
CELEBRITIES AND POP CULTURE IN CLIMATE CHANGE
CAMPAIGNS**

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Introduction

When you think of climate change or global warming, what images spring to mind? For the majority of people, these imaginaries consist of stranded polar bears, dwindling ice sheets and retreating glaciers with these representations having dominated our engagements at-a-distance thus far.¹ In this article, we explore how celebrities have become the new ‘charismatic megafauna’ for climate awareness, understanding and engagement. In so doing, these ‘actors’ have taken climate change from distant places and into our living rooms and lived environments. Thus, the distinctly un-endangered, mediated species of the ‘celebrity’²—what Schickel defines as ‘intimate strangers’³—has worked to powerfully shape our perceptions and actions of climate change mitigation and adaptation. That said, there remain many open questions we pursue here as to what extent these developments will have a net benefit or cost to appropriate climate action over the short, medium, and long term.

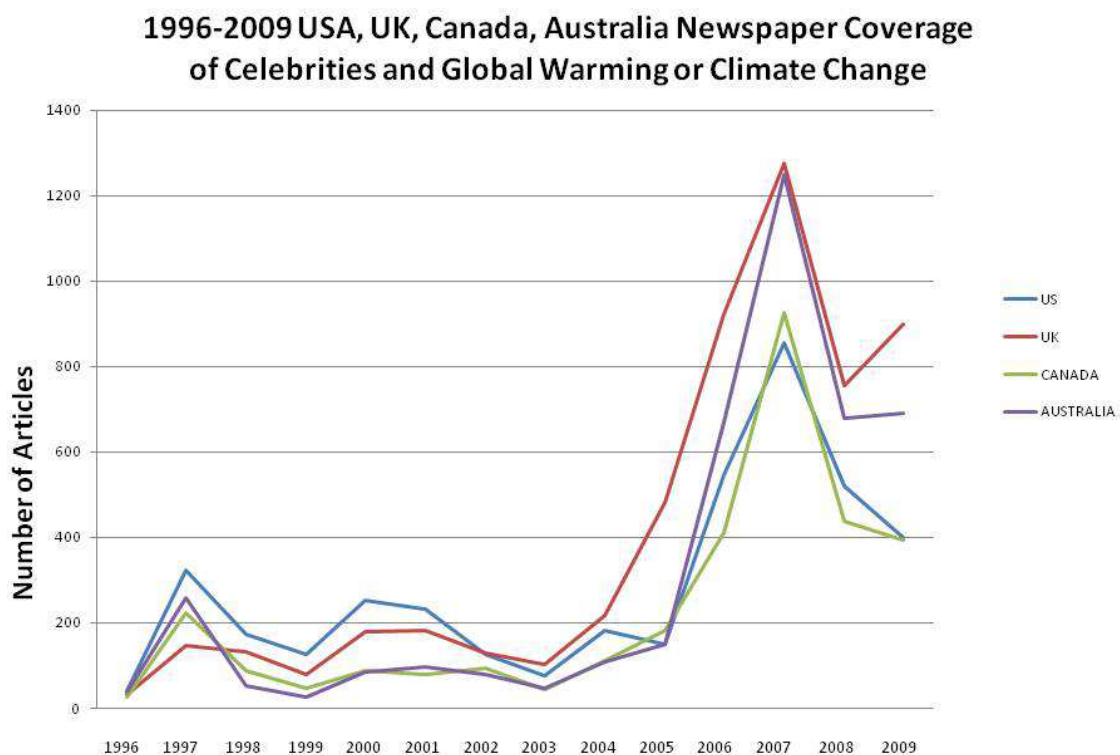
We argue, at a broader scale, then, that the cultural politics of climate change—the production and consumption of a multiplicity of climate change media and media forms—is as crucial to getting climate change ‘work’ done as the climate science itself. This is clearly illustrated by contemporary events. The storm over the emails exchanged at the University of East Anglia about representations of climate change data illustrates that—to a media that thrives on controversy and sensationalism—language and image matters as much as ‘hard data’. Indeed, after the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15), with the arrow of ‘Climate-Gate’s’ email controversy forevermore in every climate-change-contrarian’s quiver, the pre-COP15 intentions of ‘Hopenhagen’ seem to have shifted to full ‘damage control’ mode in which maintaining scientific expertise and related policy credibility is paramount. Equally, the diversity of media images, comments, and discussions accompanying Copenhagen demonstrated this. From the bloodied polar bear bodies splattering upon urban streets in Plane Stupid’s internet campaign,⁴ to the equally bloodied, pepper-sprayed activists, to the cries of ‘hoax!’ uttered by the re-emerging and now better-fed chorus of climate contrarians, audiences were treated to numerous performances seeking to influence climate change policy ‘negotiations’ in the new millennium.

That we (or at least the media) are concerned with what celebrities have to say about the environment—and indeed, a whole range of related topics—is, in our media-drenched, post-industrial era, not all that surprising. What is surprising however, is perhaps the history, diversity and extent of celebrities’ ‘endorsing’ voices and the voice of celebrity endorsements for various causes. Started in earnest in the middle of the last century through the work of the first UNICEF ambassadors⁵, the ‘celebritisation’ of international development has been extended through the high profile work and media events/appearances of Bono, Bob Geldof and Angelina Jolie, and the slightly less spectacular engagements of David Beckham, Scarlett Johansson and Helen Mirren.⁶ Indeed, both Johansson and Mirren are Oxfam ambassadors who are now managed by Oxfam’s full-time celebrity liaisons, the position of which is now *de rigueur* for nearly every charity and NGO engaged in all forms of activism. Celebrity chefs are now not only in the business of showing us how and what to cook but also what to eat, as well as how the government and large food retailers should go about procuring this food. For example, Jamie Oliver’s hugely successful UK school food television programme secured policy commitments to supply kids with healthier school meals; he is currently in the process of implementing this campaign in the US.

The environment has also been ‘made over’ and given the star treatment by celebrities, as detailed in Dan Brockington’s book *Celebrity and the Environment*.⁷ Brockington outlines the rise of the famous in conservation, many of whom, like David Attenborough and the ‘Crocodile Hunter’ Steve Irwin are/were popular media personalities. Today, the landscapes

of environmentalism are also littered with more ‘traditional’ celebrities such as Harrison Ford, who campaigns for Conservation International, Sting who initiated Rainforest Alliance, and Jack Johnson who, through his ‘All at Once’ online/offline community organising,⁸ is successfully upstaging many of his compatriots in the environmental ‘celebritariat’. Yet, climate change in particular has become one of the ‘hottest’ causes for celebrities of all stripes: from Al Gore and *An Inconvenient Truth*, to Leonardo DiCaprio with the *11th Hour*, to Coldplay, Jack Johnson and Pearl Jam doing ‘carbon neutral’ tours, to Madonna with her performance at Live Earth; with another stab at her continual reinvention, Madonna released her single ‘Hey You’ to specifically coordinate with this appearance at Live Earth as well as her image being plastered on the cover on the last dedicated ‘green issue’ of *Vanity Fair*. Figure 1 shows this growing imbrication between celebrity and climate change in media reporting over time across the US, UK, Canada and Australia.

FIGURE 1



Caption: This searched four representative newspapers in each country for ‘climate change’ or ‘global warming’ and ‘Al Gore or Angelina Jolie or Brad Pitt or David Beckham or Bob Geldof or Hollywood or Gordon Sumner or Sting or Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. or Leonardo DiCaprio or Cameron Diaz or Keanu Reeves or Alanis Morrissette or Laurie David or Coolio or Madonna or Paris Hilton or Darryl Hannah or Orlando Bloom or Keira Knightley or Morgan Freeman or Thom Yorke or Harrison Ford or Cate Blanchett or Prince Charles or Miley Cyrus or KT Dunstall or Gwyneth Paltrow or Sugarbabes or Sienna Miller or Scarlet Johansson or David Attenborough or Didier Drogba or Clarence Seedorf or Johnny Depp or Nelson Mandela or Kofi Annan or George Clooney or Salma Hayek or John Terry or Oprah Winfrey or Bill Clinton or Julia Louis-Dreyfus or Jack Johnson or Ronaldinho or Chris Martin or Bono or Richard Branson or Arnold Schwarzenegger or Robert Redford. Through the LexisNexis, Factiva, and ABI Inform/Proquest databases, we surveyed coverage in these sources: the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Courier Mail* (and *Sunday Mail*), the *Australian*, and *The Age* (Australia); the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Sun*, the *National Post*, and the *Toronto Star* (Canada); the *Independent* (and *Sunday Independent*), the *Times* (and *Sunday Times*), the *Daily Mail* (and *Mail on Sunday*) and the *Guardian* (and *Observer*) (United Kingdom); and the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post* (United States).

At the Copenhagen summit these connections both intensified and became more interestingly global. For example, in reporting on COP15, the online version of *The Hindu* stated that ‘Arnold Schwarzenegger, Al Gore, Wangari Maathai, Desmond Tutu and a host of other

celebrities descended here on Tuesday for the climate summit, rubbing shoulders with NGOs dressed as angels, penguins and trees'.⁹ In addition, CNN and YouTube held a combined online climate change 'debate', where the panel included actress/activist Daryl Hannah engaging with Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, US journalist and author Thomas L. Friedman, 'the Skeptical Environmentalist' Bjorn Lomborg, and the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. During the discussion Hannah commented, 'this is definitely a defining moment for our politicians and world leaders to take a stand to make real change from a fossil fuel economy to a new energy independent economy'. Hannah—a long time campaigner who has been on the front lines of tree sits and is now, seemingly, an environmental pundit—has the accoutrement-completing, green celebrity-required website devoted to 'sustainable' lifestyle advice and shopping.¹⁰

What are we to make of this recent intervention of some of the most privileged and over-exposed people on the planet now speaking for it, its endangered megafauna (e.g. polar bear) and, in other settings, for the poor and disenfranchised? Is this just about celebrities developing their 'brands' through environmentally-related exposure, or does it actually offer something more? Bono, in speaking about his own work has famously described celebrity as 'currency of a kind'¹¹; yet, of what kind, and to what ends? Can celebrities, with their privileged voices raise awareness and thus grease the wheels of transition to lower-carbon societies, or do they tend to hijack the subject, obscuring complex political issues and other modes of intervention or even bringing change to a grinding halt? Put another way, and in specific reference to the phenomena we are describing here, what might be the result of the 'Paris Hilton Effect' on the 'Greenhouse Effect'?

We find it important to raise and explore these questions, both through data which raises some fundamental issues concerning the 'conspicuous redemption' of celebrities and their media exposure in the context of climate change, and through a broader contextualising discussion and analysis about the cultural politics of how change happens in contemporary society.¹² Specifically, we argue that celebrities need to be understood as part of the burgeoning influence of non nation-state actors (NNSAs) at the climate science-policy-public interface. NNSAs is a phrase used to capture a range of voices and interests including carbon-based industries, businesses, and non-governmental organizations. The growing internationalised presence of celebrities of all stripes, in taking up opportunities for engaging with much wider 'audiences' over climate change issues, means that such celebrities can both be understood as constituting a type of 'NNSA' themselves and as providing different opportunities to cut across and reconfigure their influence.

At the same time, we approach the issue of how high-profile celebrities impact on the cultural politics of climate change by connecting the more formal spaces of climate science, policy and politics operating at multiple scales to those of the spaces of 'everyday' Western (and increasingly global) culture.¹³ For climate change is a high-stakes, high-profile and highly-politicized issue that relates – often in messy, non-linear and diffuse ways – to people's lives, lifestyles and livelihoods. It is no longer thought of merely as an environmental and/or scientific issue; rather, the 'climate question' is considered one that now more than ever, permeates the more 'transgressive' realms of the economic, political, cultural and social 'lived' lives of individuals.¹⁴

The cultural politics of celebrity environmentalism

‘Cultural politics’ is a short-hand term used to describe politicized processes by which meaning is contested and negotiated across spaces and over time. This involves not only what representations and messages are taken up in the public arena and gain traction, but it also accounts for those that are absent or silent.¹⁵ For example, in a study of UK tabloid newspaper coverage of climate change, Boykoff found a relative dearth of coverage on climate justice and risk.¹⁶ Considering the distinctly working class citizenry that read UK tabloid newspapers, these sources are well-positioned to offer readers a relevant critical assessment of power structures that shape associated issues of differential vulnerability to and impacts from climate change. However, the study found that rather than providing representations of climate justice and risk that may be meaningful for this readership, these UK tabloid outlets instead provided news mainly on other aspects of climate change, therefore perpetuating rather than confronting existing power asymmetries and inequalities.¹⁷

Considered in this way, ‘cultural politics’ also captures how discourses are tethered to positionalities, our material realities and social practices.¹⁸ By interrogating celebrity environmentalism as illustrations of ongoing and contested processes, we can then more effectively analyse a range of issues, such as how power flows through constructions and maintenance of knowledge, norms, and conventions.¹⁹ In this way, we consider how celebrities – as musicians, actors, public intellectuals, artists, sports figures, etc. – permeate and create what becomes ‘permissible’ and ‘normal’ as well as ‘desired’ in everyday discourses, practices, and institutional processes. Approaching these spaces of cultural politics in this way then helps explore, as Tim Forsyth describes it, “how social and political framings are woven into both the formulation of scientific explanations of environmental problems, and the solutions proposed to reduce them”.²⁰

Environmentalism and celebrity today might be said to be connected through one dominant form or ideology in particular: that which social scientists term ‘individualism’. Contemporary understandings of individualism tend to refer to the idea that our status or role as individuals has been formative to Western cultural modernity²¹ and that this has been exacerbated in particular since the 1970s and the rise of a ‘post-Fordist’, consumer-led society, helped along by the gradual waning of social democracy and its broader systems of social welfare, and the extension of free market ideology or ‘neoliberalism’. To theorists such as Noel Castree, for example, such modes of individualism are an important tool through which to understand contemporary environmentalism. Castree argues that whilst the environmental movement had ‘a thrilling late 1960s infancy and a rather successful 1970s adolescence’, its development was stalled by the Reagan and Thatcher years and that in effect today its least threatening versions have become popularised and channelled to serve ‘the cause of a specifically liberal, market-led form of environmental management in key Western states’.²² This results, he argues, in the popularity of so-called green products as potential solutions to environmental degradation and in the splintering-off of ‘the environment’ from the rest of life, a way of thinking which ‘permits many people to salve their conscience by consuming products from the Nature Company whilst driving their children to school in a Range Rover’.²³

Castree’s writings join that of a range other commentators critical of the vaunting of individualised and ‘commodified’ solutions to environmental degradation, including George Monbiot’s recent dismissal of green products as more unnecessary eco-junk.²⁴ Scholars Timothy Luke, Tim Forsyth and Zoe Young have each critiqued it as ‘the new green order’ in which the individual is burdened with an overwhelming (rather than partial) responsibility for change.²⁵ This process has been dubbed ‘responsibilisation’: in which climate change

becomes the responsibility of the *individual* rather than of governments or regulators who might affect significant policy changes through altering production and distribution. Such commentators perceive the ‘responsibilisation’ of the individual, and the privileging of it over effecting change at larger macro-levels, as a false solution which is both severely retrograde and dangerous. However, other theorists have embraced the potential of action at the level of the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘everyday’. For political theorist and waste guru Robin Murray, for example, ordinary peoples’ enthusiasm for recycling – even though it might be inconvenient, and they don’t get paid for it – demonstrates a ‘productive democracy’ at work: a social resource which is marginalised to everyone’s loss.²⁶ There is much, we might say, to be gained from bringing together the more productive aspects of these two accounts – i.e. of bringing the potential of individual enthusiasm together with an analysis of broader social and political forces.²⁷

It is also in relation to such interpretations of an ‘individualised society’²⁸ that the recent ‘wave’ or expansion in celebrity culture over the past two decades has been situated. The celebrity, in many ways, can be understood as the figure of the individual *par excellence*²⁹. For example, we might consider how the ‘striving’ motif which commonly marks so much star behaviour is consistent with the aspirational, ‘meritocratic’ ethos of post-Fordism; or how the new wave of celebrity, so much of which is about lifestyles of fabulous luxury and wealth, has coasted into being at a time when there has been an increasing polarisation between rich and poor. It is sometimes suggested that the emphasis on contemporary celebrity is symptomatic of an increasingly undemocratic society in which power is ceded to fewer individuals rather than more broadly distributed through the population at large³⁰. In these terms celebrity is seen as ‘colonising’ zones which were previously more ‘democratic’. Arch examples here include: the expanding cult of personality’ or ‘celebrification’ of the leaders of political parties³¹; Sharon Stone’s incursions into the UN, widely viewed as monopolising valuable UN time to little effect³² and the Geldof/Bono steering of UK foreign policy through *Make Poverty History*, initially welcomed and later disparaged by a variety of NGOs who accused them of derailing their agenda³³.

Against such narratives are accounts which view celebrity as the necessary oxygen of publicity for particular causes. In a cluttered marketplace of mass-specialisation, consumer fragmentation and multi-platform media, it can be deemed harder to be influential; and celebrities have therefore become one important ‘branding’ tool that causes – like products – have adopted. The increasing sophistication of branding and marketing management within the third sector and the rise of social marketing have tended to augment the selective use of a particular celebrity to promote a cause.

However, this raises the question of how celebrities ‘work’ on us, itself the focus of a fair amount of academic discussion and debate over time.³⁴ These debates about the ‘effect’ of celebrity have tended to complicate the relatively simplistic understanding of celebrities as functioning only in terms of ‘role models’. Instead, celebrity can be understood as connecting to/with people through a much wider range of psychological processes to do with identification and desire. This is acknowledged at an everyday level: think of how celebrities are often widely scoffed at or laughed at and yet continue to be influential enough to shift high volumes of merchandise and generate cultural trends (such as in dress or language). As such, they often have disproportionate power in helping shape both news agendas and cultural discourse, as figures occupying what Nick Couldry has termed ‘the place of media power’. To examine how these dynamics work in relation to climate change, we shall

consider some specific examples of celebrity involvement in environmental awareness and ‘climate crisis’ campaigns.

Celebrity emissions and everyday life

While it is not hard to catalogue and describe celebrity voices and performances in the media surrounding climate change, it is hard to pinpoint the contribution of these performances to the climate change debate, changes in the public’s everyday behaviours and/or climate change policy. Are celebrities—and, specifically, the pop culture surrounding them—making a difference? Do they get us to care or is it just about distraction and expansion of the ‘brand’ of the celebrity in question? How and in what ways are they acting to (potentially) make some sort of difference? The preceding discussion about the cultural politics of celebrity suggests that whilst the contemporary rise of celebrity undoubtedly registers the growth of an unequal society with gross imbalances of power, there is also little that is definitive within these processes of celebritisation of the environment and climate change and, indeed, if anything, contradictions, paradoxes and complications abound. Here we specifically explore some ways that climate change is being ‘brought home’ to the scale of the everyday through interventions that combine the use of celebrities and popular culture.

There have recently been more specific and ‘popular’ engagements with climate change in the growing media ‘convergence cultures’ of celebrities, music, television, movies and the internet in efforts to bring these issues into the (particularly youthful) spaces of the ‘everyday’. Two brief examples stand out. First, the UK NGO Global Cool has taken to popular culture with a vengeance as a way to not only raise awareness but provide practical solutions for climate change mitigation for ‘hipsters’. As they put it:

Global Cool is the climate change charity to get you inspired. We want you to feel good about doing good. ... Global Cool will show you that saving the planet isn't just for the people who like to think of themselves as 'green'. We give you practical advice on the things you can do that will make a positive difference. ... And we're not going to preach. We won't lecture you on melting ice caps. We're not asking you to live in a cave or give up all the good things in life. We're here to show you that you can lead a fun, exciting life and do your bit for the environment, with a few tweaks to your lifestyle and a little help from our celebrity friends.³⁵

Global Cool’s celebrity friends include Sienna Miller, Rosario Dawson, Laura Bailey, Stella Tennant, Jo Wood, Florence (from Florence and the Machine); the organisation is also ‘partnered’ with and ‘supported’ by some of the largest consumer brands around (Microsoft, Virgin, Facebook, and CBS) as well as other brands associated with clothing (ASOS.com), fashion (London Fashion Week [brought to you by Canon!]), music festivals (VFestival, Download) and sustainability (Futerra, Regeneris).

One of the more unique ‘pop culture-ist’ efforts by Global Cool was to get the DJ Erik Prydz to help with a music video entitled ‘Proper Education’ featuring a remix of Pink Floyd’s ‘Another Brick in the Wall’ paired with school kids on a public-housing estate secretly installing compact florescent bulbs into unaware residents’ flats. At the end of the video, there appears a tag-line reading “*you don’t need a proper education to save the planet*”. A wider description of the project states that

[t]he video, directed by Marcus Adams, saw Prydz consult with climate change charity Global Cool. Global Cool believes that the solution to defeating global warming lies within the power of the individual, empowering them to take personal action to make a valuable difference. Global Cool spokesman, Dan Morrell said, “The message is clear, climate change is happening but collectively, given the tools and the knowledge to actively reduce CO2 emissions, and to encourage others to do the same, we can collectively push the climatic tipping point long into the future”.³⁶

Although Global Cool works to open space for individuals to do something about climate change, through these methods they elevate voluntaristic and individualized forms of engagement and climate change problem-solving. It illustrates how, in the cultural politics of climate change—in both its discourses but also focus on celebrities—there is a problematic tendency to lionize and entrench the acts of individuals *primarily as consumers* at the expense of more critical forms of citizenship amid powerful carbon-based political economies. This tendency was reinforced through the motto of Live Earth—‘One world. One climate. Be the change’—has at its base, the desire to motivate individuals to do *something* for the climate.³⁷

Second, MTV has launched itself into the climate change ‘act’ through its ‘MTV Switch’ campaign. Similar to Global Cool’s multi-media approach, but based much more around its television empire, MTV Switch operates through ‘public service announcements’ (PSAs) that work “...to promote environmentally-friendly lifestyle choices amongst youth in order to reduce the carbon emissions that contribute to climate change” (MTV, 2009). Centred on celebrity shorts from, for example, the likes of Cameron Diaz and video feature spots developed by some of the world’s leading-edge marketing firms (who did the work *pro bono*), the main hub of the campaign is the website³⁸ which contains access to the videos, has a user-generated blog, news, downloads and a carbon footprint calculator hosted at the Global Cool website. Not surprisingly, the focus, *again*, is on shifting individuals towards “simple climate conscious acts” much like the Global Cool campaign:

Everyone, no matter what age or where they live, can take action to reduce their carbon footprint. The MTV SWITCH PSAs seek to entertain, intrigue and inspire viewers to take on simple climate conscience acts such as unplugging mobile chargers and turning the thermostat down one degree. (MTV Switch, 2009)

Further, much like not needing a “proper education” to do something for the climate, one PSA in particular—the aptly named ‘Green Song’³⁹—argues that ‘greenwashing’ is so prevalent that one shouldn’t (have to) be ‘green’ to be ‘green’:

*Politicians feed us crap, celebrities are the same,
It’s all about how green they are and who deserves to blame;
How green you are not how much you give,
How loved you are is how you live,
So know your greens and think a bit,
Because you don’t have to be green to be green.*

That MTV is airing videos arguing we shouldn’t trust ‘green’ celebrities, many of whom are the very face of MTV Switch itself, is not only deeply ironic—if not passing straight into

parody and, indeed, absurdity—it should tell us that, *in the least*, this individual ‘celebritisation’ of climate change⁴⁰ *thoroughly* delineates the mainstream of the contemporary cultural politics of the environment.

So what to make of all of this? First, there is a need to consider the political economic realities that not only construct people’s everyday lives through (unequal) material and structural relationships, but, in particular, the ‘everyday’ inequalities many experience in their access, understanding and abilities to respond to climate change campaigns constructed by popular culture and specifically embodied in celebrities.

Second, if anything the cultural politics of climate change are rife with ambiguities, conflicts and contradictions that complicate not only their actual material and ‘real’ effectiveness, but their role in doing that ‘something’ for the climate. As discussed above, making climate change an everyday, individualized issue—e.g. ‘Be the change’—can, on the one hand, empower individuals and create and foster emergent movements through these ‘singularities’ at the same time it can work to unfairly ‘responsibilize’ and socialize climate change problems and solutions at the level of the individual and consumers at the expense of holding the State, institutions and corporations accountable. Further, individualization can work to atomize social, economic and environmental change—taking a cue from the playbook of neo-liberalism—at the same time as it might make space for the development of a more transgressive ‘cosmopolitan ethic’⁴¹ by suggesting that, by ‘being the change’, individuals/consumers are connecting to the global environment. And, given that shifting to more ‘climate neutral’ consumption—e.g. ‘low carbon’/meatless diets, hybrid cars, the purchase and installation of florescent light bulbs—is what is very often recommended (by celebrity activists and campaigns), it is argued that it is through these acts of more ‘sustainable’ consumption choice that this cosmopolitanism and/or ‘ecological citizenship’ can be enacted on an everyday basis.⁴² Thus, for better or worse, the global ‘climate change’ citizen can seemingly be created, fostered and furthered through a simple trip to the shopping mall, local store and/or supermarket, attendance at a football game, or by just flicking off (or *on* as the case may be) the television or movie screen.

Conclusions

In December 2009, US Senator James Inhofe (Republican – Oklahoma) flew to the COP15 gathering leading a self-proclaimed climate change ‘truth squad’. There he reiterated his (in)famous credo that climate change was a hoax. When a reporter asked who was behind the hoax, he added texture to his ‘truth claim’: “It started in the United Nations,” declared Inhofe, “and the ones in the United States who really grab a hold of this is the Hollywood elite”⁴³.

On its face, it might be argued that prominent figures from the ‘culture industry’ have indeed contributed substantially to public understanding of climate change causes and consequences, thereby significantly shaping ongoing dynamics in climate policy and politics.⁴⁴ While it might be tempting to cast these ‘Hollywood elite’ as either ‘villains’ or ‘heroes’, their significance lies in what they are connected to and how their power is wielded. In relation to this, Inhofe’s utterance opens up a set of compelling contemplations.

Certainly, there are possible pitfalls in the relationship between climate change mitigation campaigns and celebrity, though perhaps not in the ways Inhofe intimated. For example, increased associations by these actors have the potential to reduce proposed critical behavioral changes to the domain of barely effective individual fashion-fad rather than

influence substantive long-term shifts in popular discourse and political action. As we explored in the previous section, celebrity efforts may trivialize behavioral change and only serve to ramify contemporary forms of consumerism. Inhofe's argument about those perpetuating the climate 'hoax' also illustrates how opportunities are opened to isolate or dismiss efforts as those of the 'liberal Hollywood elites' by their expanded celebrity reframing of these politicized spaces. So, the very act of 'making it personal'—and thus an individualised, responsibilised response—through celebrity involvement, also makes it possible to attack climate change movements, and specifically their scientific underpinnings, through *ad hominem* attacks and 'character assassinations'.

Seen in a more positive light, one can viably argue that celebrity endeavours possess the potential to enrol a new set of 'actors' by mobilizing audiences and fan bases that otherwise would not find interest in climate change. Considered in this way, celebrity commitments may have raised multi-scale questions and sensibilities, where wider-scale change is generated from the inspired individual consumer-citizen. It could be argue that it is precisely this championing of (climate) causes that is needed to pioneer a new-millennium reflexivity, usher in meaningful change and inspire emergent engagements and movements.

Overall, we can safely say that these series of dynamics mean that the last two decades have given rise to an emergent 'climate science-policy-celebrity complex'. While scientists, business and environmental groups have dominated the discursive spaces of climate-related issues through mass media since the 1980s, there has also emerged a broader spectrum of voices in these intervening years. As such, the boundaries between who constitute 'authorized' and/or 'expert' speakers (and who do not) have expanded, and these spaces have been increasingly infiltrated by new 'actors' populating climate science-policy-public interactions⁴⁵. These influences have changed the architecture and processes propping up and perpetuating our everyday understandings, and actions as they relate to climate change. It means that whilst it is possible for celebrities to effect relatively 'significant' changes – as the agenda-pushing activities of Al Gore will, to many, symbolise – there is also a significant structural tendency for celebrities to back highly individualised campaigns which do little to threaten those vested power dynamics and corporate interests which need substantial overhauling and regulation to be able to effectively combat climate chaos. Celebrities, in other words, are somewhat unstable 'loose cannons', figures who are not politically elected yet frequently have sizeable amounts of media power to wield and work through and with.

As we leave the '00s' and head into this new decade, the varied engagements of these climate change actors – predicaments and progress therein – will continue to influentially shape discourses and bound considerations for possible climate action. It may be tempting to dismiss these influences from popular culture as mere distraction, as the 'real work' of climate science-policy negotiations continue past COP15 to COP16 in Mexico City and beyond. However, the set of considerations explored here aim to help us more capably ponder how celebrities and popular culture may in fact represent potent yet also fraught opportunities to reach places where many citizens reside discursively, materially and cognitively. Herein lays the contested nature of these expanded interactions. These elements outlined above may be as important as any formal climate governance architectures – such as those negotiated at COP15 – to the long-term success or failure of efforts to take carbon out of the atmosphere or keep it out. To the extent that we fail to examine 'how' these representations and symbols are negotiated through relations of dominance, subordination, and inequalities of access and resources, we miss out on important components of the "scope of [climate] politics"⁴⁶ and the spectrum of possibilities for future climate activism.

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