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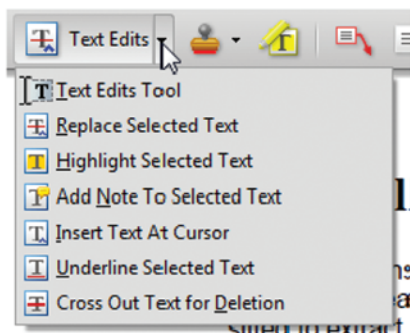
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## Why coldplay sucks

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*(Received xx xxx xxxx; final version received xx xxx xxxx)*

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Has being a dad changed him [Chris Martin]? ‘Well, in the same way I can’t believe that I’ve been allowed to be in Coldplay, I can’t believe I’m allowed to be Apple’s dad.’ He takes a ruminative suck on his cocktail. ‘It’s extraordinary. Every day I treat it like, “Wow, so you want to hang out with me!” It’s made me see things in more extreme colour. If we’re going to do something with the band, I want to do it properly and to the power of 10. [. . .] Things that seemed threatening seem even more threatening – on a very simple level, things like environmental stuff.’ 5 10

The following lunchtime Coldplay fly by private jet to Palm Springs, 35 minutes from Las Vegas. The band can now afford to fly wherever possible, and the increased privacy and speed mean that Apple will be able to join her father on tour more often. ‘I certainly don’t want her to stay at home all the time,’ Martin says. ‘As she gets older, hopefully she’ll come out as and when she wants. I always thought it’d be cool to be in school and say, “I’m not coming in today – I’m off to Costa Rica to see my dad play.” I do think that wins you a few points’ – Craig McLean (2005). 15

I am deeply honored that my hometown – would consider me – for an Honorary degree – UVIC, BC, Canada – is where I would have loved to attend University – so this is a special honor and My Family is hoping it comes true – People often perceive me a little different than reality – not that I haven’t played into the Rock’n roll image – a majority of my work has been in Animal rights, protecting the environment and children – trying to use my image and abilities to speak on behalf of – human rights/Aids education world wide – VIVA Glam campaigning etc – I have had close friend say I’m ‘The most famous unknown person on the planet’ – It’s hard for me to imagine – taking that as a compliment – maybe I should share – my ‘resume’ here – with a few letters of support – just the highlights – UVIC requested this to nominate me – (still in progress – but would be in environmental studies) – Pamela Anderson (2013). 20 25 30

AQ1

Coldplay really are annoying, aren’t they? Or at least the band’s principal moralist is. Chris Martin and his posh-boy colleagues may be proud supporters of Future Forests, contributing gifts to plant trees as counters to the music industry’s carbon footprint (Hernández 2011). But the big man up front will always find time to jet his daughter around. Pamela Anderson, conversely, is a true daughter of the Canadian soil, honorary director of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and a fundraiser for humanitarian work in Haiti. Her website even reads as if she wrote it, rather than some lame publicist.<sup>1</sup> Pamela and 35

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Some of this work draws on Maxwell and Miller (2012).

Posh Boy represent two sides of celebrity activism, a Janus-face that swivels in different directions. They inform the paradoxical nature of this commentary as it unfolds.

I was struck by three things as I read this issue's fascinating papers. First, that we should think of celebrities as transcending human form. Animals, rivers, even coin-operated climate change-deniers, count. Second, that a dominant analytic reliance on human culture-industries celebrity, whether by theorists at an environmental meeting or activists in a journal of sociology, misses key points about the perhaps tiny, superstructural roles that stars can play, so powerful are their names in orienting discourse. And third, that human celebrities should offer a reflexive account of their practices and conditions of possibility as part of their activism. I dedicate this piece to the latter point, even though it is tangential to several of these papers, because it is an area where I hope I have things to say. My focus will be on Hollywood.

By 2005, celebrity endorsements, whether directly or indirectly commercial, whether advertisements for products or politics, added up to more than a billion dollars. Such expenditure is predicated on what marketing mavens call 'associative learning'. There is supposedly a match-up between commodities and stars, such that the lifestyle of celebrities can be purchased along with the products they favour (Till, Stanley, and Priluck 2008, pp. 180, 188). It is not clear how well this works for environmental advocacy, given research that suggests minimal media attention to these efforts, audience scepticism and credibility that lessens with the contentiousness of the issues discussed (Thrall et al. 2008, Becker 2013, Spears, Royné and Van Steenburg 2013).

Then there is the question of motivation. The major US talent agencies in Los Angeles allocate executives to identify suitable causes for their celebrity clients to endorse, based on visibility, publicity, subjectivity, interest, availability and other pragmatic factors. The Green Celebrity Network (<http://greencelebrity.net/>) offers 'Celeb gossip about famous humanitarians and stars going green'. It is astonishingly boring and trivial for all but the keenest viewers of E! Entertainment Television (such as myself). The Network adores car collector Jay Leno and endorses his everyday-guy approach: 'I'm fascinated by alternative power sources and fuels. I'm also interested in powerful cars that are fun to drive. Hey, I'm a car guy first, environmentalist second – what can I say?' (Leno 2008).

The blogroll of eco-celebs at <http://www.ecorazzi.com/> lists many Hollywood stars, events and resources, with tales and numbers aplenty: for instance, 25 celebrities drove up at the 2006 Academy Awards in Toyota Priuses, and the red carpet at 2007 Emmy Awards was made from 95,000 recycled soda bottles. For its part, *Hollywood Today* praises actors who give green gifts of 'vintage-inspired' camisoles and recycled jewels. The 2008 Academy Awards ceremony was designed to cut 630 tons of carbon emissions from similar affairs. A 'Hollywood Goes Green' summit meeting was held in 2007. The Environmental Media Association honours deserving celebrities (who nominate themselves to receive awards) with a Green Seal. And the movie *The day after tomorrow* received CarbonNeutral® status, a global proprietary offsets seal, because its director paid perhaps US\$200,000 to plant trees to mitigate the projected 10,000 tons of carbon dioxide emitted by the production (Maxwell and Miller 2012).

It's easy to criticise such activities. MSNBC.com, for instance, has admonished the superficiality of green celebrity, for which '[T]he Prius reigns supreme as the current status symbol', suggesting that air pollution would be a more accurate symbol of Hollywood life, since the 'trucks that carry equipment from studios to locations and back continue to emit exhaust from diesel engines', as do many on-set generators (Ventre 2008, Pantera 2009). The major scholarly study of this topic names the motion-picture industry as the biggest producer of conventional pollutants in Los Angeles, because it uses so much electricity and petroleum, and releases hundreds of thousands of tons of deadly emissions each year.

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In the state of California over all, screen drama's energy consumption and greenhouse-gas emissions are akin to those of the aerospace and semi-conductor industries (Corbett and Turco 2006). 90

We need to connect this issue to celebrity eco-activism. Take the example of Leonardo DiCaprio, who according to *The Nation* (2013), recently began a sabbatical from film-making to 'fly around the world doing good for the environment'. As part of this noble venture, DiCaprio helped launch the World Wildlife Fund's 'Hands Off My Pants'. With compelling solipsism, an accompanying press release focused on a country that had incurred DiC's particular displeasure: 'I am joining WWF and others in calling on Thailand's government to show leadership on elephant conservation by shutting down its ivory market before the country hosts a meeting of 177 nations on wildlife trade in March 2013.' This, *The Nation* (2013) reports, was duly noted in the local press. 95

Of course, some of the money DiCaprio uses to 'fly around the world doing good for the environment' comes from his films. Consider *The beach*, directed by Danny Boyle, whom the soft British left so adored for the crass nationalism that opened the 2012 Olympic Games that *The Guardian* has ennobled him as a 'champion of the people' and 'the ultimate idealist' (Freedland 2013). 100

Like his fellow environmentalist DiCaprio, Boyle felt strongly about the need to elevate Thai environmental consciousness while filming there. Boyle claimed *The beach* was 'raising environmental consciousness' among a local population whose appreciation of these things lagged 'behind' US 'awareness'. Boyle elected to 'give something back to Thailand' by hiring Thai apprentices, even though this meant 'We were hauling 300 fucking people around wherever we went. And you know how hard it is to learn Thai names. Every lunchtime was like a prime minister's reception.' Tough for the British abroad. Johnny Foreigner seems to be everywhere. Before the film was released – but no doubt having had their consciousness raised – environmental groups sued the studio and local officialdom for contravening the National Parks Act and the Environmental Protection Act. It took seven years, but the Thai Supreme Court found in their favour in 2006 (Maxwell and Miller 2012). 105

In other words, DiCaprio's participation in ecological matters is not only called into question by his jet-setting activist's carbon footprint, but by the very industry that feeds his needs. 110

Charlize Theron also comes to mind. Her charity, the modestly eponymous Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project, aims to diminish HIV/AIDS on the continent.<sup>2</sup> She is also starring in the fourth *Mad Max* film, which as I write is under critique due to a leaked report on its by turns lazy and demanding film-makers, who dedicated resources to the destruction of the Namibian environment in order to remake it for their own comfort (Weidlich 2013). 115

But the story of environmental celebrity does not have to be self-regarding, as is so often the case when white people encounter the other and have difficulty civilising them. For example, Darryl Hannah travels by train across the US and was arrested after chaining herself to the gates of the White House in protest at the proposed pipeline delivering oil from Canada to the US. This forms part of a serious engagement on her part with issues that often sees her face media opprobrium and state violence (Rowlatt 2009, Wood 2009, Goldberg 2013). Such actions produce press coverage, photos and discourse in a reflexive way that takes account of one's own complicity, as opposed to a hypocritical Messianic wish-fulfilment that is fuelled by the very actions it purports to change. 125

For many environmental organisations, celebrity is just one component of their campaigns, alongside public science, policy advocacy, grass-roots action and alliances with other groups. That said, both stars and environmentalists should turn an investigative gaze on the culture industries that foment celebrity. This is essential not for the tired reasons that 130

are routinely dragged out to deride celebrity culture, but for vibrant old and new ones that are all too often obscured from our view – namely, the ecological impact of those industries on our Earth.

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## Notes

1. She shouldn't feel bad about her friend describing her as the 'most famous unknown person on the planet'. The Total Celebrity Endorser Rating Model has given her a .337 rating (Knott and St. James 2004, p. 93).
2. See <http://www.charlizeafricaoutreach.org/about-ctaop/values.html>

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