CELEBRITY POLITICS

MARK WHEELER

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Image and Identity in Contemporary Political Communications

Mark Wheeler

polity

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Introduction

This book emerges from the growing interest of practitioners and academics in the notion of ‘celebrity politics’. As modern public relations (PR) techniques have cross-fertilized with a commercialization of journalistic practices in the global media, there has been a personalization of politics. This has led to cultural researchers considering how celebrities are established through their media profiles and to reflect upon their political functions (Cashmore 2006). While these questions lead to a sophisticated analysis of celebrity in media studies, political science’s investigation of celebrity has remained, until recently, relatively marginal (West and Orman 2003).

Those academic works that consider celebrity politicians and politicized celebrities have largely viewed celebrity as a ‘manufactured product’ that has been fabricated by media exposure (Louw 2005; Turner 2004). This concern about the negative effects of celebrity first emerged when the American sociologist Leo Lowenthal argued that US media coverage had replaced ‘idols of production’, such as politicians, with ‘idols of consumption’, such as film stars (Lowenthal 1944). In turn, Herminio Martins contended that celebrities were an ‘elite without power’ who combined maximum observability with an inability to provide life chances for the public’s benefit (Martins 1964). Therefore, public interest in celebrity politics has been manipulated through ‘pseudo-events’ staged by cynical media to construct a perceived myth of individual aspiration (Boorstin 1971: 58). Subsequently, there has been an unfavourable emphasis on the incursion of celebrities into political communications.

There is, however, an emergent literature which has addressed (i) how celebrities are taking part in politics and (ii) whether politicians are behaving as if they were celebrities. Among these works are:

Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (Braudy 1997); John Corner and Dick Pels, *Media and the Restyling of Politics: Consumerism, Celebrity and Cynicism* (Corner and Pels 2003); P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Marshall 1997); Graeme Turner, Frances Bonner and P. David Marshall, *Fame Games: The Production of Celebrity in Australia* (Turner, Bonner and Marshall 2000); Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (Turner 2004); Liesbet van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge* (van Zoonen 2005); Darrell M. West and John Orman, *Celebrity Politics* (West and Orman 2003); and Sean Redmond and Su Holmes, *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader* (Redmond and Holmes 2008).

In dealing with celebrities in global politics, Andrew F. Cooper, in *Celebrity Diplomacy* (Cooper 2008), examines the ways in which celebrity activism is changing the nature of diplomatic practice. Moreover, the late Mark D. Alleyne considered the role of United Nations (UN) goodwill ambassadors and the organization's commitment to public relations reforms in *Global Lies? Propaganda, the UN and the World Order* (Alleyne 2003) and 'The United Nations' Celebrity Diplomacy' in *SAIS Review* (Alleyne 2005). A further series of essays in Liza Tsaliki, Christos A. Frangonikolopoulos and Asteris Huliaras (eds), *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics* (Tsaliki, Huliaras and Frangonikolopoulos 2011), has considered celebrities' impact on international affairs.

John Street's work, most especially his seminal article 'Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation' (Street 2004), has led to an understanding of how celebrity politicians may give a greater expression to the representation of democratic behaviour (Street 2002, 2003, 2010).[1] Consequently, as celebrities and image candidates assume the authority to promote political agendas among target audiences/citizens, it becomes necessary to reflect upon their significance in election campaigns, political agendas and activism. Therefore, Street's concerns about the relationship between political aesthetics and democratic practice refer to a wider debate about the dynamics which are shaping in a period of late modernity (Street 2010: 259).

Here it is contended that traditional civic duties are being replaced by alternative forms of virtuous participation. Within this new political environment, different types of agency such as celebrity politics have become centrifugal forces for public engagement. Thus, as Street demonstrates that celebrity politics is consistent with a liberal democratic ethos, his work provides a basis upon which alternative forms of political behaviour may be considered in relation to their ability to enable citizens to reconnect with their societies (Street 2010: 260).

This text will outline the academic debates and methodologies which have defined the literature concerning the political and social impact of celebrity. Chapter 1 will discuss the questions associated with the worth of celebrity politics and consider how these forms of political representation segue into a wider debate about post-democratic societies wherein civic values are being replaced by new forms of participatory engagement. The chapter demonstrates the analytical frameworks which have been used to interpret celebrity politics and outlines a holistic approach to underpin this study.

The second chapter provides a historical context for the phenomenon of celebrity politics to offset the view that celebrity engagement is only a recent development. Therefore, chapter 2 considers how the principles of fame, which have been drawn upon from antiquity, were transformed into the constructs of celebrity during the tide of democratic reform in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It will consider how this democratization of celebrity reached fruition in twentieth-century American political and cultural life, as politicians employed fame as part of their imagery, and as film stars and protest singers used their renown for the purposes of political endorsement and advocacy.

Chapter 3 provides a contemporaneous account of the development of celebrity politics in the United States (US) and how these matters have informed other western liberal democracies, especially the United Kingdom (UK). It employs Street's distinction of celebrity politicians who have incorporated the principles of fame for electoral achievement (CP1s) and the rise of politicized celebrities who have become activists in their own right (CP2s). On the one hand, this typology is employed to analyse how media-savvy politicians, such as Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Tony Blair, have utilized their celebrity as part of their political weaponry (McKernan 2011: 192–3). On the other, the chapter looks at the rise of celebrity endorsements in campaign and electoral politics in the USA and the UK.

With reference to Street's typological distinction, chapters 4 and 5 respectively provide a greater focus on the rise of celebrity politicians and politicized celebrities in modern democracies. In the fourth chapter, the analysis considers Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign in which image candidacy was cross-fertilized with the social media to popularize a form of 'liquid celebrity' (Redmond

2010). It compares this approach with the UK mainstream parties' employment of political imagery. In particular, the British media focused on the personalities of Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg as a result of the introduction of the televised leadership debates in the 2010 general election. The chapter concludes with how 'celebrity' was employed in the context of negative campaigning and the extraordinary rise and fall of the 2008 Republican vice-presidential nominee Sarah Palin.

Chapter 5 considers how far politicized celebrities have utilized their fame in terms of grass-roots political activism. It considers how modern American film and rock stars have been involved in a range of campaigns concerning political reform, health provision and social justice. The chapter discusses how such forms of CP2 behaviour have been transferred to UK politics as an instant celebrity culture has emerged in association with reality television programmes, a commercially driven news media and the viral powers of the social media. In turn, these forums have established a public 'space' wherein celebrity activism has been deemed credible and legitimate. In this respect, such behaviour was validated during the 2011 UK phone-hacking scandal when stars such as Hugh Grant led the campaign to unearth the unethical and illegal journalistic practices which had been endemic in Rupert Murdoch's News International tabloid papers. Simultaneously, CP2s have been condemned and praised in equal measure.

Such a duality has been evidenced in the increase of celebrity activism with regard to international affairs. Therefore, chapter 6 moves beyond the confines of the nation-state to consider how CP2 advocacy has been most explicit with reference to questions about international justice and fund-raising. Celebrity advocates have understood that it is their responsibility to represent oppressed peoples in global forums. These activities were given a major boost by Bob Geldof's *Live Aid, Live 8* and *Feed the World* campaigns. In tandem, the U2 singer Bono has accessed the centres of diplomatic power to place matters of global debt and aid resources on the international agenda. Andrew F. Cooper suggests that a new form of 'celebrity diplomacy' has materialized, to the mutual benefit of social reformers and the oppressed. However, many scholars and members of the international community have complained that CP2 activities have reinforced cultural stereotypes. Further, despite generating publicity, many academics remain sceptical about the ability of celebrity-directed campaigns to address the structural economic inequities which have defined relations between the global North and South.

Throughout its exploration of the theoretical, historical and thematic issues that have arisen as a consequence of celebrity politics, it is this volume's intention to consider whether political celebrity represents an imposition of ideological power over the public or if it is indicative of more deep-seated changes to new alternative mechanisms of political engagement. In effect, it will ask whether the celebritization of politics has had a positive or negative effect on the political process and what the democratic implications of these developments are.

1

Celebrity Politics in an Era of Late Modernity

In recent years, there has been an increased involvement of celebrities in the political process. Moreover, as P. David Marshall has commented, politicians have constructed 'public personalities' which have an 'affective function' in the organization of interests and issues (Marshall 1997: 203–4). Clearly, these actors perceive their usage of the mass and multi-media to be an effective means through which to influence public opinion: 'In the shift away from emphasising party ideology, the political style of individual politicians . . . [who] take on an aura of "celebrity" . . . [and the symbolism of the] stars of popular culture . . . becomes central to how audiences . . . evaluate [political] performance, authenticity and . . . capabilities' (Dahlgren 2009: 137). But how far do celebrity politicians and politicized celebrities actually affect outcomes? Traditionally, many academics view celebrity politics as a 'manufactured process' fabricated by media exposure (Louw 2005; Turner 2004). Public interest in celebrity has been manipulated through contrived pseudo-events staged by a collusion of communicators and cynical media (Boorstin 1971: 65). However, as celebrities have become politically engaged with the public sphere, this literature requires a re-evaluation. As stars have intervened in politics and political leaders have been defined by celebrity-style imagery, it may be argued critical theorists do not take into account the extensive influence of celebrity politics on decision-making processes.

An alternative literature has identified the trend towards the celebritization of politics, both theoretically (Street 2004) and empirically (Holmes and Redmond 2006), through an exploration of celebrity performance, authority and representation. As celebrities and image candidates gain credibility to assume a moral authority amongst target audiences/citizens, it becomes necessary to reflect upon their significance when mobilized for political campaigns, policy agendas and activism.

These matters of political representation segue into a wider debate wherein civic values are being replaced by new forms of participatory engagement. In a period of late modernism, there have been growing concerns that a democratic deficit has occurred with regard to a collapse in virtue and citizenship. For instance, Robert Putnam has argued that new forms of social capital are necessary to reconnect citizens with their societies (Putnam 2000). Alternatively, Henrik Bang suggests that different types of political capital are emerging as duty-bound citizens are being replaced by virtuous 'everyday makers' who utilize local narratives to reciprocate with one another (Bang 2003). Similarly, John Keane, in his analysis of 'monitory democracy', in which consumer-led forms of representation become a measurement of accountability, has considered how changes to matters of 'voice' and 'output' have reformed democratic practices (Keane 2009b).

This chapter will outline the contours of the academic debate concerning the celebritization of politics. Critical theorists have provided an analysis of the 'media spectacle' in which celebrity engagement has been defined by public relations techniques to distort political issues. Conversely, Liesbet van Zoonen, John Corner, Dick Pels and John Street have considered how the popular aesthetics employed by celebrity politicians may be linked with reconfigured democratic practices.

Therefore, this analysis will critically assess how celebrity politics operates in reference to the post-democratic changes that have been identified by Bang and Keane. It will discuss whether their analyses provide an appropriate framework to capture the worth of celebrity politicians. While these authors have focused on matters of output, this chapter will consider the extent to which celebrity politicians 'input' aggregated forms of 'agency' to affect political outcomes. From these differing perspectives, it will seek to define a normative position concerning the worth of celebrity politics.

Finally, this chapter will define a systematic taxonomy to analyse the relationship between celebrity politics and democratic behaviour. Thus, it shifts the focus of attention away from those studies which have sought to categorize the different types of celebrity political behaviour (West and Orman 2003) to the definition of a methodology through which to analyse such activism. In this context, it will review the work of Paul 't Hart and Karen Tindall ('t Hart and Tindall 2009; Marsh, 't Hart and Tindall 2010), who have sought to consider the forms of political action which are associated with celebrity politics. Elsewhere, it will be necessary to consider how van Zoonen (2005) and Street (2003, 2004) have elaborated on the analytical distinctions which can be made concerning the significance of the typologies of political personalization and celebrity performance. In turn, this analysis will draw upon Max Boykoff and Mike Goodman's model of politicized celebrity systems (PCS) to provide a framework to consider the aesthetics of celebrity political behaviour (Boykoff and Goodman 2009). The chapter will conclude by considering how these typologies may be utilized to discuss what constitutes an effective celebrity politician in a modern political culture.

The traditional paradigm: style over substance

Several commentators have contended that fame is a manufactured process. Through an industrialization of culture, an individual's 'celebrity-ness' has been facilitated by the mediatization of their public rather than their real persona (Drake and Miah 2010: 52; Louw 2005: 172). Concurrently, critics such as Neil Postman claim that the mass political communication process has led to a decline in rationality as televisual style dominates substantive debate. This critique suggests that the 'Americanization' of politics has had a negative impact on the public sphere and civil engagement (Postman 1987). In tandem, political communications have evidenced the convergence of public relations (PR) techniques with commercial pressures drawn from the global media. For instance, Thomas Meyer notes: 'Insofar as the elite actors in the political system put their faith in the basic question of media democracy – publicity equates with success – they yield to the time constraints of media production, because they suppose that it is the price they have to pay to win public support' (Meyer with Hinchman 2002: 45).

Most recently, with the escalation of media and communication outlets, together with the voluminous use of talent and reality shows such as *The X Factor* (2004 onwards) and *Celebrity Big Brother* (2001 onwards), instant celebrities can be launched in conventional and viral terms (e.g., Susan Boyle or Justin Bieber). Such ubiquity in fame has combined with a more visible and self-conscious employment of celebrity activists. Under such conditions, Daniel Boorstin has argued, illusions are mistaken for reality (Boorstin 1971).

Thus, politicians have 'packaged' themselves as commodities to be sold to voters in an era of partisan de-alignment in which the electorate no longer clearly identifies with the political parties on matters of ideology or class (Franklin 2004). This suggests the relationships between 'leaders' and the 'crowd' which have evolved in late capitalist societies are vital to 'the mass's support of the individual in mass society' (Marshall 1997: 43). Therefore, public interest in celebrity politicians and politicized celebrities has been manipulated through pseudo-events staged by a cynical media to construct a perceived myth of individual aspiration (Boorstin 1971: 58). This has created a spurious egalitarianism which 'in reality . . . [serves] only to thwart a desire for equality, and [conceals] the extent to which the practice of government [departed] from its democratic ideal' (Hatch 1960: 65). In turn, the public is presented as being culpable as it cannot understand that it has been manipulated by elite marketing tactics.

Moreover, Darrell West and John Orman contend that celebrities propagate irrelevant understandings of complex political matters, remain ignorant and do not justify their status in claiming to represent public opinion. In particular, West and Orman argue that the skills of celebrity politicians are ill-suited to statecraft as they lack knowledge or expertise of public policy so that 'serious political issues become trivialized in the attempt to elevate celebrities to philosopher celebrities' (West and Orman 2003: 118).

This anxiety over the negative effects of celebrity on the political process may be traced back to the American sociologist Leo Lowenthal, who argued that US media coverage had replaced 'idols of production', such as politicians, with 'idols of consumption' such as film stars (Lowenthal 1944). Similarly, C. Wright Mills contended that the attention placed on celebrities meant that they had become part of a new power elite (Mills 1956). Elsewhere, Herminio Martins claimed instead that celebrities were an 'elite without power' whose maximum observability combined with an inability to provide life chances for the public (Alberoni 1972; Martins 1964).

Even Graeme Turner, in his multifaceted account of celebrity, accepts the notion of celebrity as a mechanism of political inauthenticity (Turner 2004: 134). He explains celebrity politics as a means of commodification through which to neutralize consumer/citizen engagement (ibid.: 135). While Turner views the cultural consumption of celebrity as part of a new media democracy in which a heterogeneous public sphere allows for the possibilities of a do-it-yourself (DIY) citizenship, he chooses to ignore the social relations proffered by politicized celebrities. In tandem, Nick Couldry and Tim Markham remain sceptical that celebrity culture can positively contribute to the public's political engagement. They contend that the followers of celebrities will be unlikely to be politically engaged and that any claims of democratic renewal offered by celebrity politics are spurious (Couldry and Markham 2007).

Following this logic, Louw has argued that, with the exportation of the US cultural values accompanying the globalization of the mass media, branded performers have narrowed the gap between politics and entertainment (Louw 2005: 192). In his definition of 'pseudo-politics', Louw suggests there has been a PR-ization of issues 'in which celebrities are now enlisted to whip up mass public opinion' (ibid.: 191). By defining celebrity politics as the latest manifestation of the fame game, he views the media as a site of ideological control: 'Fame-game endorsements constitute the ultimate PR-ization of politics based upon pure puff and hype. The media's preference for glib sound bites, good visuals, and attractive famous faces is exploited to the full to celebrity-ize and emotionalize issues as a tool to steer mass public opinion' (ibid.: 191).

In the most sophisticated variation of this position, Douglas Kellner has developed his concept of the 'media spectacle' to suggest that the emphasis on celebrity replaces the complexities of policy with stylistic gestures (Kellner 2010b: 123). He argues that the media coverage of celebrity politics creates a form of spectacle which 'frames' politicians and celebrities as global 'superstars'. Kellner suggests that such a form of spectacle has substituted substance with a symbolism in which the norms of democratic engagement have been undermined (ibid.: 123). He concludes: 'An informed and intelligent public thus needs to learn to deconstruct the spectacle to see what are the real issues behind the election, what interests and ideology do the candidates represent, and what sort of spin, narrative, and media spectacles is being used to sell candidates' (Kellner 2009: 738).[1]

Underpinning the traditional paradigm is a normative position that suggests that celebrity politics diminishes the processes of representative democracy. In such a pessimistic extrapolation, 'politics has been subsumed within the culture industry, so that the political is now another commodity to be marketed, purchased and consumed in a cycle of false needs and unsatisfied desires' (Calcutt 2005). These critiques of celebrity activism reflect the values of the Marxist Frankfurt School whose critical theorists contended that the media had become an expression of dominant ideologies. Effectively, culture has been industrialized and distorted for the needs of political and social elites. Chris Rojek has concluded that, as celebrities express an ideology of heroic individualism and upward mobility, they standardize social conditions to perpetuate consumption and subdue the masses (Rojek 2001: 33).

These critiques share Jürgen Habermas's modernist concerns that there has been erosion of the public sphere. Instead of the mass media providing an agora in which legitimate debate may occur, the public space between the state and the electorate has evidenced an irrational political discourse. Therefore, partial or distorted information is presented as being representative when, in reality, it is controlled by powerful influences (Habermas 1992). Thus, the most common analysis of celebrity-ness has referred to the ubiquitous growth of the visual media in which fame operates as a tool with which to manipulate public opinion (Louw 2005). It is contended that such a usage of performance is pitched on artifice and sells prescriptive ideas to a disengaged public.

Celebrity politics and political aesthetics

The employment of political rhetoric has a historical continuum which offsets the modernist dismay directed at the personalization of politics (Braudy 1997; Pleios 2011: 251). As Liesbet van Zoonen comments, the classical Greek Sophists contended that virtue was a matter of great performance (van Zoonen 2005: 72). Moreover, Niccolò Machiavelli demonstrated that the proper union of personality and performance was necessary to create the appearance of a convincing 'good' political persona if it was not a requirement to actually have one. Therefore, while the conditions of the modern political communication have changed, the need to determine a persuasive political performance remains timeless.

But even without acknowledging this important historical context, the traditional paradigm may be criticized as it perceives political communication as a top-down process between political elites and a passive electorate. It disregards the polysemic range of readings that audiences take from popular culture. Such an approach ignores the effects of celebritized politicians in forging new or alternative social formations for engagement. Effectively, it does not evaluate the influence of imagery on the public's political decision-making processes. Instead, it is necessary to consider the changes in political aesthetics that have facilitated the opportunities through which celebrities have influenced politics and politicians have popularized themselves. As P. David Marshall comments, 'a leader must somehow embody the sentiments of the party, the people and the state . . . a celebrity must somehow embody the sentiments of the audience' (Marshall 1997: 203).

John Corner and Dick Pels contend that the previous forms of partisan allegiances have eroded to be replaced by a focus on post-ideological lifestyle choices which foreground matters of aesthetics and style (Corner and Pels 2003). As voters are less likely to identify with political parties, the public have favoured 'more eclectic, fluid, issue specific and personality-bound forms of political recognition and engagement' (Corner and Pels 2003: 7). Corner argues that through their 'mediated personas' – the individual's public image – film, television and music stars have created new forms of identification in which they attain public admiration, sympathy and authority to effect political expression (Corner 2003: 83). Thus, celebrities and image candidates command credibility through a conjunction of de-institutionalization, personalization and parasocial familiarity to transcend other agencies of social authority[2]: 'It is a claim that derives from a world which, says Keane [2002] . . . is marked by . . . (the) popular identities (which) derive from the role models provided by celebrities who inhabit this world' (Street 2004: 442).

Within a world in which mediated personas are taking greater shape and importance, it is necessary to investigate celebrities' integral roles in political campaigns. While symbolism and charisma have always shaped political communications, can celebrities use their reputations and charisma to invigorate politics with new ideas? Moreover, as Aeron Davis has shown, celebrity politicians have employed personalized forms of 'media capital' to define their 'performances' so that their mediated personas may connect with the electorate:

> In many modern . . . mediated democracies . . . several contemporary leaders, such as Vladimir Putin, Silvio Berlusconi and Nicolas Sarkozy, devote extensive resources to the cultivation and promotion of their public images to voters. In competitive presidential and majoritarian type systems . . . personalities often appear to be a more decisive factor in deciding election outcomes than policies and political records. Thus, the 'personal appeals' of Tony Blair and David Cameron are compared favourably to the 'technologically gifted' but 'uncharismatic' Gordon Brown. (Davis 2010a: 83)

In this respect, John Street's work provides a systematic attempt to analyse how the political aesthetics of celebrity politicians and politicized celebrities interlink with their democratic worth. As Street argues that celebrities have assumed a moral authority and provide credibility for political agendas, it is necessary to investigate their integral roles in political campaigns. He asks whether celebrities can use their reputations to reinvigorate politics with new ideas and an aggregated form of political agency (Street 2003, 2004, 2010): 'In other words, the study of politics requires study of the way in which performances are constructed and styles are articulated, because they constitute the transactions between represented and representatives in democracies. Significant political relationships are constructed through media performance' (Street 2003: 25).

This form of agency has shown how celebrities can interact with the public through their ability to be 'in touch' with popular sentiment (Street 2004: 447). Stars can achieve an 'intimacy with distant others' (Thompson 1995: 220) through fan networks, and these can be understood as the basis of political representation (Holmes 2005). Street contends that such a representational relationship is established by the 'affective capacity' of the celebrity's cultural performance and in such a manner stars 'give political voice to those who follow them, both by virtue of the political conditions and by means of their art . . . this is . . . a matter . . . of aesthetics, of creatively constituting a political community and representing it' (Street 2004: 449).

The impact of post-democratic theory on celebrity politics

David Marsh, Paul 't Hart and Karen Tindall contend that the academic debate concerning celebrity activism has been limited to a critique which has tended to focus on either a diminution or an enhancement of democratic pluralism (Marsh, 't Hart and Tindall 2010: 322). In their review article, these authors do Street's contribution a disservice as they fail to acknowledge its importance in placing the concerns about celebrity politics and political representation at the centre of the agenda (ibid.: 323). Yet, they have also undoubtedly moved the academic analysis of celebrity politics along as they have relocated the questions about such forms of representation into a discussion about the contested principles of late modernity or post-democratic behaviour (Crouch 2004). Consequently, despite such an omission, Street's ideas about the political engagement of celebrities have been placed into a broader consideration of the nature of citizenship, participation and equality (Marsh, 't Hart and Tindall 2010: 328).

Several political sociologists have defined the era of late modernism as being characterized by major transformations in democratic values (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Lash 1990). These ideas are comparable with but contest the notion of postmodernism, in that they suggest a self-referring modernism and fragmentation in which 'social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character' (Giddens 1991: 38). Moreover, as Zygmunt Bauman has argued, this has created a 'liquid modernism' in which individualist practices of social behaviour simultaneously create new opportunities for the self-realization of participation and exacerbate uncertainties in the human condition. Most notably, new patterns of social activity paradoxically facilitate an increasing fluidity in people's behaviour while producing existential fears over being imprisoned by such freedoms (Bauman 2000: 8).

In terms of post-democratic activity, late modernists contend such changes reflect: a replacement of hierarchies with networks; the hollowing out of the state; the replacement of politics policy with policy politics; a greater fluidity of identity; more reflexivity; changing forms of political participation; the rise of discursive network governance; the expansion of the media and celebrity politics; and a constantly reformed version of contemporary democracy (Marsh, 't Hart and Tindall 2010: 326). However, these characteristics have also led to concerns about the values of democratization. For instance, Wendy Stokes notes that 'the view that democracy is a device for delivering responsible, responsive, accountable and legitimate government . . . remains potent; . . . [Yet] . . . without wider and deeper social and economic equality there is radically unequal *access* to those fundamental rights, and thus unequal citizenship' (Stokes 2011: 396).

The fears of inequality have been heightened by the decline of civic virtues, the dismantlement of democratic associations and the disengagement of the public with the political classes. Robert D. Putnam has argued that communitarian agreements about what constitutes the common good have dissolved as trust has been eroded. In the post-democratic era of consumer politics, the citizenry has become disaffected with parties and social institutions. This has led to a profound 'thinning' of the political community and the formation of the atomized citizen who is 'bowling alone' (Putnam 1995). To fill the accompanying void, Putnam has argued for the extension of voluntary organizations to create 'virtuous circles' to accumulate social capital that enables citizens to agree on a set of shared aims for collective activity (Putnam 2000).

Elsewhere, Henrik Bang (2003, 2004, 2009) and John Keane (2009a, 2009b) have argued that civic forms of aggregated political behaviour have been replaced by more dispersed forms of participa-