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Abstract

**NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI, CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES AND THE  
CATEGORY OF ACHIEVED CELEBRITY**

The escalating interest in Celebrity Studies has not translated into a serious enquiry into the origins of the subject in social and political theory. Instead, celebrity has been usually explained as either the reflection of industrialization or the expression of timeless, unchanging fate. The result is a distorted, compressed time frame in which the phenomenon is located in unsatisfactory, metaphysical accounts of the position of celebrity in the social order. This paper aims to redress the balance by demonstrating the profound importance of *cultural intermediaries* in the social construction of celebrity. I argue that the birth of cultural intermediaries in Florentine civic humanism. Machiavelli's *The Prince* has been celebrated as a major contribution to the acquisition and effective management of tyrannical power. There is ample reason to hold this view. At the same time, this interpretation is too limiting. When read from the standpoint of the rise of Florentine civic humanism the text also, transparently, a

contribution to the successful engineering of renown. More particularly, in this respect, it offers a prototypical understanding of cultural intermediaries. As such, the paper contends that Machiavelli's study is a seminal contribution to the study of celebrity. Machiavelli formulates impersonal principles on exposure management and the accumulation of attention capital that are presented as the preserve of civil experts. Far from being the highwater mark of tyrannical power, the Prince is evidence of the growth of civic humanism and the ascending importance of expertise in managing fame. The paper aims to revise the boundaries of Celebrity Studies by demonstrating the canonical significance of Machiavelli's text and further, to propose that cultural intermediaries are seminal in the emergence and development of the fame economy.

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Celebrity Studies is a foundling discipline. In their respective, absorbing historical treatments of the origins of celebrity, Gundle (2008) and Inglis (2010) dispense altogether with the task of nominating canonical texts. Presumably, they do so on the grounds that they judge the game scarcely worth the candle. In other words, in their view, no genuinely defensible candidates exist. A counterpoint is supplied by Payne's (2009) attempt to demonstrate that classical Greek and Roman myths have direct purchase in illuminating contemporary celebrity. His is a bold, one might even say, heroic thesis, but it is not without major difficulties (1). However, at least he flags the notion that some selective forms of pre-industrial thought and writings are relevant for understanding celebrity today. This is contrary to the convention in the field. While some authors have confirmed the value of an historical perspective, and even cited the relevance of Machiavelli, they are, very much exceptions to the rule (Wheeler 2013: 35-6).

Celebrity Studies is, one might say, characterized by parental absence. To be sure, this is partly what makes it seem so fresh and contemporary. It is as if celebrity, at least in its dominant achieved and celetoid forms, belongs to our era and reveals something pointedly characteristic about us. At a pinch one might say the

narcissism of the form is believed to reveal the peculiar narcissism of the age (Lasch 1978).

While it is seductive to hold that a topic of study is redolent of sentiments that reveal the character of the times, the proposition with respect to celebrity culture is not really tenable. Celebrity may be defined as the accumulation of attention capital via self promotion and exposure management (Rojek 2012) (2). Beyond question, there are many important features of self promotion and exposure management that are particular to the modern era. As we shall see presently, the social, economic and political conditions of Modernity have been favourable for the efflorescence of a culture of attention capital cultivated around the bulbs of achieved celebrity and celestoids. However, the roots of the forces of self promotion and exposure management cannot be counted among these features. The thought of Niccolo Machiavelli, especially his (1961) argument in *The Prince*, provide a prescient and suggestive primer on the accumulation of attention capital and the governance of social impact. Of some moment here, is the fact that the book emerges from an embryonic class of experts on the acquisition and conduct of attention capital, namely Florentine republican rhetoricians and jurists. Machiavelli's subject is the getting and holding of power through a mixture of force and pacified celebrity and he is among

the first, of what we now call, cultural intermediaries. The observation throws into turmoil the received wisdom in the discipline of Celebrity Studies that cultural intermediaries are the product of the urban-industrial, democratic age. Before attempting to substantiate these claims by examining what Machiavelli wrote, it is necessary to pause and consider what might be avowed are the hallmarks of celebrity culture today. *Contra* Payne (2009), whose focus on the continuing relevance of Ancient myth smacks of an essentialist perspective on celebrity, historians argue that it is the material social and economic forces in modern metropolitan settings and market culture that 'make' and 'remake' celebrity (Gundle 2008; Inglis 2010) (3). Specifically, celebrity is held to be the result of the expansion of mass communications, especially print culture and the expansion of terrestrial television (and later satellite broadcasting) and the rising density, mobility and political power of urban-industrial populations and the elaboration of market relations (4). Of course, various notions of mobility, equality and rights weave in and out of these foundations. But the decisive point is that modern celebrity is the outcome of visible material social, economic, political and cultural forces. In brief, it is an off-shoot of what social theorists call 'Modernity' (5). Writers on the topic of the general

composition of modernity do not much attend to the subject of celebrity. Notwithstanding this, they elucidate the general, foundational, historically specific, conditions that enable achieved celebrity to grow in prominence and influence (Frisby 1986). The disembedded self, torn from traditional relations of family and community by industrialization, urbanization and the market economy and set loose on a sea of turbulent social and economic change, develops and retains both a propensity to seek status through the accumulation of attention capital and is drawn to hierarchies of power and influence built around representations of achieved fame. Contemporary men and women are enmeshed in celebrity culture because it makes for a necessary sense of new social positioning or 'distinction' to replace the vacuum created by the disruption of traditional culture organized around aristocracy and Christianity. The acceptance of the centrality of social positioning in celebrity culture carries over into an interest in the modalities of distinction, especially those having to do with signs, codes of representation and textual systems (Marshall 1997: Dyer 1998).

Now, of course, it is accepted that celebrities existed in pre-industrial, pre-democratic types of society.

However, they were overwhelmingly ascribed celebrities

whose fame derived from either bloodline or the office they held. (Often in fact, it was a combination of the two). The attention capital that they commanded was the corollary of fairly fixed, non-pliable social and religious hierarchies. This form of attention capital persists in urban-industrial, democratic society but it is no longer ascendant. Achieved celebrity and celestoid culture now rule the roost. In this vein, Gamson (2011) develops a four-fold model of the dimensions through which celebrity should be examined nowadays: the commodity of celebrity; the industry of celebrity; the celebrity rumour and gossip mill; and participatory celebrity culture (blog sites, conventions, fan clubs etc) (6). There is no place here for a continuing significant role for ascribed celebrity. Instead Gamson (2011) follows Turner (2009) in holding that celebrity has been caught up in 'the demotic turn'. That is, the expansion of the popular into the category of general culture. In turn, this implies a shift in the balance of power in favour of state-corporate and popular culture, away from old, encrusted ascribed forms. In Reality TV, even the division between the celebrity and the fan is perceived to be under erasure.

Now, while one can accept that some types of power have shifted in favour of popular influence, it behoves sound analysis to refrain from over-egging the argument.

Empirical work on celebrity in the age of mass communications and Reality TV demonstrates that most people retain a sense that celebrity is an elite cultural category and further, that the provision of celebrity (via the media) is not in popular control (Couldry and Markham 2007). To be sure, compliance with this point of view raises another prominent, contested, feature of modern celebrity which is advanced as characteristic of the present age. That is, the thesis that the corporate, state and other institutional interests construct celebrity through 'fame-framing'. At the present time, the most influential version of this thesis is associated with the writings of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1996). Preliminary to an engagement with Machiavelli then, it is worth considering Bourdieu's work in more detail because it firmly submits that cultural intermediaries are the product of the modern age. As such, it provides a powerful counterpoint to the proposition that the concept of the cultural intermediaries and an understanding of their role in self promotion and exposure management are prefigured in Machiavelli's, *The Prince*.

Bourdieu and Cultural Intermediaries

Bourdieu (1984: 359) defines cultural intermediaries as service labourers involved in the provision of 'symbolic goods and services'. They are situated at the mid-point between cultural production and mass culture. More directly, this labour may be categorized as dedicated to build the public face of institutions and celebrities. Bourdieu sees the relationship between institutions and celebrities as pivotal. One cannot have a movie star without movie culture; a major painter is meaningless unless the work can be situated in a history and field of practice in which other major painters are designated and minor painters differentiated; a celebrity chef is nothing without a point of comparison in a field of power, and so on. Bourdieu advances his argument on this basis because he wants to rebut the naïve, popular notion of the celebrity as an autonomous, inspirational force in culture. Rather, he aims to underline the *socially constructed* character of celebrity status. To this end he (1984, 1996), maintains that artistic practice and association are indissolubly enmeshed with a field of changing balance of power relationships in which cultural intermediaries are understood to be central. 'Field' is a technical term referring to a network of power. The 'field of power' refers to the domain of economic, social and political power in which cultural production occurs. It is a deliberately expansive concept that applies to

territorial boundaries (the nation state), but also encompasses global (institutional/community) dimensions. Within this domain are distinct subfields in business, education, the intelligentsia, art, religion, science and so forth. Subfields possess variable cultural capital. Forms of cultural capital are designated as assets that influence the behaviour of cultural producers, public opinion and social responses. For Bourdieu, the variable nature of cultural capital helps to explain why the attention capital of some celebrities becomes noteworthy and widely valued in the public horizon, while others are shipwrecked and forgotten.

What does it mean to propose that cultural capital is variable? The question is of interest for understanding Bourdieu's contribution because it binds attention capital with the differential and changing force of public taste makers. Thus, Bourdieu posits that the business subfield has low cultural capital, but high economic capital. In other hands, notably in the Frankfurt School tradition, this observation is applied to propose that achieved celebrity is the result of state-corporate power via its influence over the culture industry. Bourdieu's concept of variable cultural capital departs from the notion of an integrated Cultural Industry which operates in imperative, uniform ways. It holds that taste makers located in subfields highlight

creative contributions so that they accumulate the necessary attention capital to attain achieved celebrity status. To do so requires the intervention of cultural intermediaries to build and manage attention capital. Self-promotion and exposure management are only optimised if praise is measured and supported by evidence and acknowledgement. Over-praise deflates attention capital. Under-praise may not realize the latent potential cultural capital in a creative contribution. The skill in extracting value from creativity lies with cultural intermediaries in getting the balance right (Hesmondhalgh 2006).

Bourdieu's (1996) analysis of the ascent of Gustave Flaubert as an achieved celebrity exploits and develops this theoretical framework. In a paper of the present type, there is no need to go into the exceptionally detailed account that Bourdieu provides. It suffices to note that he views Flaubert's status as a great author as intermeshed with taste-champions in the intelligentsia and the media who stirred up public and business interest in his work. In this sense then, celebrity is relational. It depends upon the social positioning of creative agents in circles of taste formation and the expert intervention of cultural intermediaries.

Now, the importance of Bourdieu's thesis that cultural production is inter-connected with fields and sub-fields

of variable cultural capital is manifold. To begin with, it overcomes the naturalistic (common-sense) fallacy that views celebrity as the simple reflection of innate talent and disciplined accomplishment. Bourdieu (1996: 167) proclaims that the greatest obstacle in correctly understanding cultural production (and, by implication, celebrity) is 'charismatic ideology' that 'directs the gaze' toward the 'artist', and prevents an analysis of the power matrix from which cultural production emerges and is sustained (see also Hesmondhalgh 2006: 212-213). This immediately transforms the analytic focus from the personal qualities of the celebrity to the dynamic and uneven interrelationships between attention capital and taste makers located in fields of variable economic, cultural and political capital.

Additionally, Bourdieu's approach breaks decisively with structuralist accounts of achieved celebrity. Within Celebrity Studies the best known structuralist account is arguably Leo Lowenthal's (1961) pioneering study. It equates celebrity with the dominant mode of production. As is well known, Lowenthal maintains that the advent of mass communications, especially cheap print and radio, in the 1920s transformed celebrity culture. Before the rise of cheap print and radio, the foremost achieved celebrities in social consciousness were politician's, scientist's and literary giants. After the new

technologies of communication were established, under the control of the vested business interests behind them, the focus changed to sports stars, comedians and singers. Hence, celebrity is understood to be part of the cultural superstructure of society, finally determined by the economic substructure (the corporate-state axis).

Conversely, Bourdieu (1996) neither privileges celebrity talent and accomplishment or corporate-state power in explaining the accumulation of attention capital. By driving back analysis to the interrelationships between the two, allied with the labour of taste champions located in interlocking fields of power, he offers a more nuanced, dialectical account of cultural production and, by extension, the accumulation of attention capital.

Yet interestingly, he suggests that the emergence of cultural intermediaries only became significant in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. That is, when the capitalist industrial mode of production and the associated system of mass communications was born. In this paper, I want to take issue with this position by employing Machiavelli (1961) to propose that the rise of civic humanism in the sixteenth century was the take off point for the development of cultural intermediaries and modern celebrity culture. More generally, I want to argue that Machiavelli's account directly relates self

promotion and exposure management to the cultivation of what is now called attention capital.

### *The Prince*

While today, *The Prince* is popularly regarded as the expression *par excellence* of tyrannical rule, it is more appropriate to see it as evidence of the beginning of the *recession* of Monarchical power. For the book is a treatise on sovereignty, composed by a civil expert outside the immediate Court. Machiavelli's central claim is that he possesses knowledge that is of service to the Prince's interest in profitable rule, which, further, neither the Prince or his Courtiers can generate by themselves. While artfully praising the qualities of the Magnificent Lorenzo de Medici, to whom the book is dedicated, Machiavelli (1961: 4) boldly calls for a 'diligent' reading i.e. a reading that acknowledges the independent wisdom of the writer. Implicitly, he contrasts what he hopes Lorenzo will acquire by reading his treatise with those 'obstinate' and 'indolent' rulers who are governed by habit rather than unbiased, clear-sighted knowledge. But the knowledge in question does not spring from the brow of Lorenzo, it flows from the pen of Machiavelli. This is a daring example of advancing the pedagogy of power from the standpoint of civil society.

It suggests that sovereignty has much to learn from the rational analysis of historical and comparative data relating to power and renown. Modern readers then, have not appreciated fully enough that the book represents a slippage of power from the hands of the Court to the embrace of experts (historians, students of politics and psychology) situated in civil society.

This impression is strengthened when one turns to the specifics of the advice that Machiavelli imparts to the Prince. Again, it is popularly assumed today that the treatise is a primer in the black arts of rule. To be sure, Machiavelli (1961: 12, 32) pulls no punches in recommending that rule sometimes requires 'injuries' and 'cruelties' to be 'inflicted' on rivals and dissenters. The common objections that he unduly relishes this advice, or permits it to permeate the book, are very much exaggerated. The greater part of his argument consists of entreaties to use what we would now call 'self promotion' and 'exposure management' to acquire, through directed pacification, the compliance of the people. Machiavelli actually favours government by the Republic over rule by Principality or Dynastic rule. Virolli (1998) traces this preference back to the influence upon Machiavelli of republican philosophers in Florence, supplemented by jurists, and via them back to Quintilian and Cicero's rhetorical dialogues. What Machiavelli

understood by the term 'Republic', and indeed 'politics', is very different from our day (Bock, Skinner and Viroli 1993; Black 2013). To us, power in Machiavelli's world seems peculiarly personalized in the figure of the ruler. For us, a leader that is at once acknowledged to be the principal beneficiary of the domain and the best hope of his subjects smells like a fishy proposition. This is because we take for granted independence of mind, equality before the law and free speech. Ours is an age in which the right to hold opinions that may conflict with sovereignty, and participate in dissent, are tolerated. Critics have rightly complained that independence and equality are much over-done as hallmarks of contemporary democracy (Wolin 2008; Runciman 2013) (8). On this, it is surely correct to observe that part of the enduring appeal of Machiavelli rests in his anticipation of these objections. Machiavelli's realism commands him to hold that even Republics will have their 'Prince-like' figures. So while the counsel for rule that the book advocates is addressed to rulers of principalities the logic of effective power carries over to Republics. Thus, for Machiavelli, the wisdom of the Prince rests in visibly acting well for the purpose of self-interest. Influence and fame then, are heavily representational. Part of the armoury of the Prince is to ensure that the public automatically equates the

interests of the sovereign with the good of the people. It is not necessary for the visible appearance of acting well to coincide with genuine good intentions. Indeed, Machiavelli's account of self promotion and exposure management clearly acknowledges the competitive advantage of guile and dissembling. Physical force and threats are accepted as legitimate weapons of rule. But the successful Prince is also well versed in the arts of flattery, spin and being economical with the truth, when circumstances demand. A healthy Kingdom is when the Prince is perceived to be the conduit of the people's will, just as celebrity status is maximized when it is believed to derive from a genuine popular relationship. The Prince must rule by symbolically positioning the will of the people to comply with his sovereign right to rule. In Machiavelli's view, it is only necessary to concoct and achieve the *appearance* of this alignment. This requires the Prince to be adept in reading popular opinion. It does not debar the use of vice when circumstances dictate. So long as these means are used to present the appearance that the interests of the Prince and the security and prosperity of the Kingdom are one. A profound claim made in *The Prince* is that a large element in being adept lies in building wisdom from the counsel of independent advisors. This is understated in the book. It leaves Machiavelli open to the charge that

he is being too Machiavellian in tacitly hiding the shift in power involved behind his lavish praise for the sovereignty of the Prince. For the thrust of his argument is actually that the wisdom of the Prince necessitates a new type of advisor, located in civil society, and versed in knowledge about human affairs to which the Prince is not party. The parallel with the celebrity who relies upon the wisdom and energies of cultural intermediaries is irresistible. A major quality of the type of expertise valued by Machiavelli is the use of reason rather than aristocratic privilege to interpret history and the necessities of rule. This has been much misunderstood by secondary commentators. For example, Foucault (2007: 65) sees *The Prince* as a treatise on the most effective means of overbearing Monarchical domination. He submits that it takes for granted that Princely power is absolute. This is because rule is perpetually seen as endangered by jealous rivals who seek to challenge and surmount it, by both legitimate and illegitimate means. Hence, the Prince is obliged to resort to skulduggery and vice in order to ensure sovereignty. Pocock (1975) and Skinner (1978a, 1978b) contradict Foucault. Both situate Machiavelli's text at a juncture wherein what may be termed 'civic humanism' based in the study of history and application of reason starts to gain ground (Dean 2013: 72-6). That is, a

moment in which the spread of wealth, education and cultural literacy increases the density of person's in civic society with the capacity to bring their own historically informed wisdom to bear upon the question of the politics of rule. It is in this observation that the proposition that *The Prince* is a prototypical examination of the necessity and role of cultural intermediaries resides.

Commentators often allude to Machiavelli's work as a seminal contribution to comprehending the politics of personal power (Grant 1999; Viroli 2013). This implies a nuanced understanding of the history and psychology of manipulation. What is often under-estimated is that Machiavelli advances his discussion upon the rationale that he trusts to the value of a comparative-historical methodology. In his 'Dedication' to Lorenzo he enjoins that his conclusions are founded upon careful perusal of 'the deeds of great men' and 'long acquaintance with contemporary affairs and a continuous study of the ancient world' (Machiavelli 1961: 3). The history and comparisons of political fame is the bedrock of Machiavelli's perspective. In addition, it is a statement of the worth of civic expertise. Hence, ironically, the study which purports to bolster sovereign power is in fact a sign that the Prince is destined to become

increasingly reliant upon the expertise of experts and their adjuncts in civil society.

*The Prince* belongs to the modern era of celebrity production in which the promotion of attention capital and exposure management are taken to be matters for professional expertise rather than Courtly protocol. In Machiavelli's view, the Prince can no longer impose himself upon the public by force of will or by relying upon the counsel of his immediate aristocratic retinue. The enlistment of men of learning, with knowledge of the history of politics, fame and the psychology of popular persuasion, is now a prerequisite of optimal sovereignty. Despite the fact that Machiavelli directs his remarks to the Prince and is preoccupied with the question of optimal territorial rule, his thoughts on the desiderata of renown transfer easily to other categories of fame. It is upon this basis that my claim that the time has come to pay tribute to the canonical status of the book in *Celebrity Studies* rests.

Machiavelli holds that a principality is governed either by hereditary doctrine or is acquired through marriage or violence. In the case of hereditary doctrine, celebrity is ascribed. As for the acquisition of power through warfare, marriage or *coup*, celebrity is either achieved or enhanced by deeds. Successful husbandry of renown is presented as the result of 'assiduity' in managing the

interests of the powerful against the weak (Machiavelli 1961: 8). Just as the power of the modern celebrity depends not only on engineering a popular relationship, but upon winning friends in high places (Cooper 2008). Machiavelli submits that renown seldom endures if it is imposed by fiat alone. To endure, it must be supported by a battle for hearts and minds. As I have already indicated, it would be wrong to cast Machiavelli as a devotee of democracy. Unwaveringly, he insists upon the necessity for sovereignty, based in judgement and discipline, to impose effective rule. He calls this quality *virtu*. Frustratingly, the precise meaning of the term is elusive in Machiavelli's thought. Broadly speaking it refers to the popular perception of a leader possessing fitness to rule. Again, Machiavelli leaves his readers in no doubt that the emphasis here is on public *perception*. If the Prince possesses genuine prowess it is to the benefit of the principality. However, what matters more for the continuation of effective rule is the *perception* of *virtu*. It is quite possible for the occupants at the apex of the social hierarchy to practice moral probity and apply honest standards of dealing. But there is no necessity for this. Indeed, Machiavelli (1961: 57) proposes unapologetically that effective prowess sometimes requires vice:

A prudent ruler cannot, and must not, honour his word when it places him at a disadvantage and when the reasons for which he made his promise no longer exist.

Enduring celebrity is therefore a matter of adapting to changing conditions by dissembling if necessary, and jealously protecting the public image of *virtu*. In addressing these matters, Machiavelli assumes that an indispensable part of successful political leadership (and achieved celebrity status) is effective self promotion and exposure management.

Despite the general popular perception of the book, Machiavelli (1961:59) insists that Brutality and Cruelty are fatal for secure rule. Grandeur, courage, sobriety and strength are advocated as qualities of the Prince; fickleness, frivolity, effeminacy, cowardliness and irresolution are deplored as, in the long run, attenuating the perception of *virtu*. A merit of his discussion is the subtle understanding displayed with regard to the psychology of acquiring and piloting renown. To become a secure ruler, the *Prince* must refrain from aggression against the property and women of his subjects. At the same time, responsibilities of brutality and cruelty may be delegated to notaries. Indeed, remaining innocent in the eyes of the public while

scheming and managing the destruction of opponents and quelling of dissent, is understood to be an important part of the Prince's armoury (and that of achieved celebrity in general).

Machiavelli sees celebrity as seductive. Where it works, it brings acclaim and even devotion. For this reason, it is easy for those at the top to suffer from self approval and narcissism. Self-infatuation is dangerous for the exercise and maintenance of effective rule and secure fame. The Prince must not heed flatterers at court. He must strive to be open-minded and objective in decision-making, apply policies clearly and adhere to them with resolve. Through this he demonstrates *virtu*. *Virtu* requires the Prince to be regarded by the public as at the pinnacle of society not just in the sense of being at the apex of power and influence, but in being superior as, what might be described as an 'instalment' of the species. This public image is assisted by developing effective symbols of renown and sprinkling them 'assiduously' throughout society.

In this, Machiavelli (1961) anticipates the question of mediation in celebrity culture in multiple ways. For example, he argues that where Prince's are new to leadership, it is important to learn about the husbandry of fame and influence from history. Machiavelli (1961: 19) writes:

Men always follow the tracks made by others and proceed in their affairs by imitation, even though they cannot entirely keep to the tracks of others or emulate the prowess of their models. So a prudent man must always follow in the footsteps of great men and imitate those who have been outstanding. If his own prowess fails to compare with theirs, at least it has an air of greatness about it.

Successful leadership, and enduring fame, require open gateways of communication to sections of every pertinent rank of society. Needless to say, in exposing the hazards of over-reliance upon courtiers, Machiavelli under-scores the value of the impersonal advice provided by experts situated outside the boundaries of the Court. The rising tide of civic humanism carries cultural intermediaries into positions of legitimate influence over Courtiers and the Prince. Their ascendancy is a vital element in the formation of the modern state and the concomitant symbolic system of rule and personal advantage.

Machiavelli is the theorist *par excellence* of power.

While his account has valuable insights into widening the means of persuasion and attention capital, the core of his ruminations is about how to tie the knot of power to

ensure that pretenders come to grief and luminaries prosper. He certainly has penetrating things to impart on the subject of mediation in sovereign rule, exposure management, and the accumulation of attention capital. However, viewed through the lens of Celebrity Studies Machiavelli's account of the requirements of sovereign rule, contains valuable general insights for grasping the psychology and social construction of renown. His examination of the opportunities and threats of courtiers and the virtues of mediation in consolidating the lustre of luminaries in the public sphere operates with a tacit distinction between the private and public face of celebrity. He powerfully insists that effective renown requires a compelling public image. This situates the Prince and his advisors in a reflexive relationship with the unfolding social construction of celebrity. Regarded in this light, *The Prince* is nothing less than a primer for building, protecting and enhancing achieved celebrity, through the good office of cultural intermediaries.

When it comes to the question of the relationship between achieved celebrity and the public, Machiavelli maintains that the cards are heavily stacked in favour of the Prince and his courtiers. The populace is portrayed as credulous and fickle (Machiavelli 1961: 21). Public image is all. Machiavelli (1961: 58) writes:

Men in general judge by their eyes rather than by their hands; because everyone is in a position to watch, few are in a position to come in close touch with you. Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are.

*Virtu* is won through the perception of prowess. Among the strategies for winning consent are the demonstration of compassion above cruelty; the avoidance of frivolity; vigilance; and sagacity in the appointment of courtiers (counsellors). These strategies are conceived to work optimally when they are in a state of balance. To err too far in one direction is to tempt the vagaries of fortune. Machiavelli (1961: 55) cites the case of the disgraced Roman commander and consul Scipio. Celebrated for a magnificent victory over Hannibal, his armies in Spain mutinied against him. The 'only reason' was the 'excessive leniency' that he allowed his soldiers.

Although Machiavelli is the theorist *par excellence* of power, he is not a believer in the omnipotence of rulers. Everything in his discussion bespeaks that power and fame are conditional. What can be won through marriage, violence and 'assiduity' may be lost through error or fortune. A key element of *virtu* is

the correct reading of fortune. If this is accomplished the Prince will 'withstand the blows of Fortune' (Skinner 1081: 35). An understanding of comparative conditions of rule, history and psychology are prime resources in effective exposure management and the accumulation of attention capital. However, they are not foolproof. It is in the nature of the human condition that the best laid plans of man are at the mercy of fortune. In terms of the relative balance between *virtu* and fortune Machiavelli(1961: 79) gravitates in terms of a 50/50 ratio. 'Men prosper,' contends Machiavelli (1961: 81), 'so long as fortune and policy are in accord, and when there is a clash they fail.'

#### Machiavelli and Celebrity Today

Naturally, many aspects of his perspective have dated. For example, throughout, he attributes profound consequences to the Church as a fundamental opinion-maker in the dissemination of fame and the application of power. Things are very different today. Nowadays, while the Church remains an influence upon public opinion in secular society, the balance of power has shifted decisively in favour of the state-corporate axis. Multi-national media organizations like the *Hearst Corporation*, *News Corp*, *Vivendi* and *Bertelsmann*, often operating in

conjunction with the state apparatus, have the technological and symbolic means to frame events so as to encourage preferred social responses to calculated representations of institutions and celebrities (Castells 2009). Machiavelli could not have anticipated the vast expansion of global capital or, through the development of mass communications, its quasi-monopoly grip on attention capital. This raises a related matter. Machiavelli's fame economy or celebrity field is divided between the Prince and his courtiers, rival courts, ecclesiastical leaders and commoners. This is consistent with the Feudal model of power that recognizes three temporal estates in the constitution of society, namely the Lords, the Clergy and the People. Today, the formation of cultural intermediaries is more complex and multi-layered. Machiavelli's universe is not far removed from that of, a seminal theorist of power and scarcity that came after him, Thomas Hobbes (1651). Hobbes famously regarded the natural state of society as a war of all against all. This assumes a weak public sphere in which the actions of luminaries are continuously questioned. Disquiet and public unrest are the name of the day because the rule of the strong is perpetually resented and, from time to time, challenged. Hobbes (1651) disdains this state of affairs because it offends the ultimate principle of sound leadership which he takes

to be the preservation of the peace (Runciman 2008: 16-44). Transcendence to the acknowledgement and sovereignty of common interests requires what Hobbes (1651) and later, Rousseau (1762), refer to as social contract.

Much of this transfers without much difficulty into the star-making strategies of contemporary managers and publicists in the field of celebrity. The relationships between stars and moguls in the Hollywood studio system, or managers and pop stars/models in the music/fashion industries are described in terms that suggest that some are marooned in a pre-Hobbesian state. Without the checks and balances of social contract that recognize the common good, celebrity may exploit attention capital to turn it into a monstrous super-tanker of unchecked self aggrandisement. Certainly, self-infatuation is widely understood to be a threat in celebrity status (Rojek 2012:41-47). While Machiavelli confined his worries about this eventuality to the *travails* of the Prince, and how they impact upon him and his immediate circle, today we must allow for the consequences of this condition in celebrity culture at large. The so-called 'mirror effect', by which the self absorption of luminaries is replicated in their fan base, is interpreted as a source of social *malaise* (Pinsky and Young 2009). Another way of looking at this in relation to the mirror effect is to

explore how the triumph of luminaries in one sector of the fame economy is imitated in other sectors. For example, within Celebrity Studies currently, researchers display keen interest in the resemblance between the social construction of the public image of political leaders and celebrity representations from the film industry (Marshall 1997: 227; Street 2004; Cooper 2008). Alexander's (2010) recent work on the Presidential re-election campaign of Barack Obama argues that Obama's political managers borrowed many of the techniques of exposure management and the accumulation of attention capital pioneered and profited in Hollywood. Within Media-Communication Studies the main model to explain convergence between the spheres of entertainment and party politics is *mediatization* (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Kepplinger 2002; Schulz 2004; Campus 2010). This term refers to the gradual conformity of constitutively separate spheres of human relations to the conventions of the entertainment media. So the presentation of public image in politics, the organization of lectures in the Academy and public debate in general comes to resemble the standards set by the television studio, the radio mike and the film lot. This approach to celebrity is not without critics. For example, Couldry (2008) has expressed strong reservations. His concern centres upon an understandable unease with the slippage of the

mediatization approach into a one-way model of convergence. That is, the precedents and motifs of the entertainment media are depicted as setting the normative parameters for public discourse in separate consecutive fields, notably the construction and communication of public images. Against this, Couldry (2008) maintains that mediation is a more relevant analytical concept. This is because it recognizes bilateral and multilateral exchange between institutionally distinct, consecutive fields. The great emphasis in Machiavelli's (1961) approach upon the opportunities and costs of fortune and the contribution of civil experts, anticipates the place of mediation at the crux of understanding power and renown.

Another issue that serves to separate some aspects of Machiavelli's analysis from conditions in our time concerns the composition and influence of civic humanism. In Machiavelli's text, what we now call civic humanism publicly acknowledges that the prowess of the Prince may be corrupted. It opens up a space for the articulation of impersonal precepts and rules for the effective conduct and psychology of the Prince. That is, it holds that the Prince may endeavour to strive to maintain sovereignty without cognizance or due regard that his prowess has fallen into a corrupted state. Nowadays, gossip columnists, star-watchers and media pundits of all sorts

do not permit persons of renown from refraining from being cognizant that their prowess has fallen into a corrupted state. Rather, the accountability of celebrities and the justification of prowess have become continuous features of public auditing and commentary. So much so, that cultural intermediaries in the employ of celebrities are now charged to manage attention capital 'assiduously' i.e. against gain-sayers in the media and disaffected elements in the public.

By the sixteenth century then, Florentine politics ceases to presume that direct, sovereign rule is autonomous i.e. that it is entirely a matter of sovereign right. The notion is born that effective rule by the Prince requires dedicated specialists, situated in civil society, with expert historical, cultural and political knowledge to formulate and communicate impersonal principles of what we would now call 'self promotion', 'exposure management' and the accumulation of effective 'attention capital'. For the embryonic cultural intermediaries of sixteenth century Florentine politics, power is no longer concentrated in the hands of the Prince. It has partly migrated into the control of experts with specialist knowledge in self promotion, exposure management and the accumulation of attention capital. The assistance in question is ministered not by fiat but by the application of impersonal, rational principles, based upon specialist

knowledge of history, politics and psychology. Crucially, it candidly offers expert solutions to remedy and transcend problems of leadership. These certainly encompass the use of intrigue and violence, but in preference, they concentrate upon peaceful methods of winning laurels and compliance from public opinion. Among the qualities Machiavelli (1961: 51-69) mentions here are firmness, generosity, parsimony and compassion. As an exemplar, he (1961: 71-2) mentions Ferdinand of Aragon who displays great skills in battle and diplomacy and contrives to 'always keep his subjects in a state of suspense and wonder'. Contra Foucault (2007) then, Machiavelli's topic, is not just determining the most expeditious means of acquiring and retaining political power. *The Prince* is also, obviously, a guide to getting and retaining renown via the expertise of specialists in self promotion and exposure management located in civil society. The Prince, in conceding that attention must be paid to these principles, is unintentionally laying the foundations of the end of sovereignty. In this respect, the principles and solutions laid down by Machiavelli are of the utmost interest to students of Celebrity.

Concluding Remarks

An outsider, coming to the field afresh, may quickly form the impression that Celebrity Studies was found in a handbag (8). Secondary accounts afford the impression that celebrity is a spin-off from the massive transformation in the mode of production associated with industrialization, the rise of democratic systems of government and the enlargement and refinement of mass communications. The unfortunate consequences of this are that celebrity is either erroneously imprisoned in an abbreviated time-scale (industrialization) (Lowenthal 1961) or, in effect, is portrayed as a timeless, unchanging species-category (fate) (Payne 2010). In both respects the elucidation of the historical record, psychological motivation and social construction of celebrity is less than satisfactory.

Switching the focus from the question of the personality of renown to the social construction of renown adds the influence of cultural intermediaries to the mix.

Alongside technology and fate, it brings into vantage the topic of the expertise of cultural intermediaries in effective self promotion, exposure management and the accumulation of attention capital. In this respect, I believe, Machiavelli's *The Prince*, can be rightly described as canonical. Indubitably, this remarkable study may be read as a treatise for the solitary benefit of the Prince. Interpreted thus, a la Foucault (2007), it

represents a manual for the personal acquisition and defence of power. Tipped a little sideways, to allow in a contrasting light, *The Prince* offers something rather different and, I believe, more interesting. Nothing less is presented than a manual for the expert engineering of renown. Machiavelli's study both reflects and reinforces the development of a new sphere of influence in the social order of political management and fame. This sphere is occupied by experts in the acquisition and management of power and the construction and application of renown. Their influence is based in specialist, rational knowledge of history, psychology and the manipulation of the crowd. Renown is a matter of applying impersonal principles of 'fame-framing' to elicit an appearance of *virtu* that is palatable to the public. In turn, this presupposes the place of cultural intermediaries located at a midway point between the imperatives of sovereignty and the affirmation of public opinion. Machiavelli's cultural intermediaries are not just power-brokers. They are also, obviously, star-makers who take it upon themselves to determine sound methods for engineering renown through elevating distinction in the sub fields of strategically positioned taste-champions and the broader public. It is in this space that Florentine politics begins a trial-run in scoping out how the presentation of celebrity elicits mass

persuasion and formulating impersonal principles of self promotion, exposure management and the accumulation of attention capital. This is what makes Machiavelli's *The Prince* seminal for students of celebrity today.

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- 1) Ultimately, the overall effect of his analysis is disappointingly laboured and unconvincing. The historical precedents and parallels read as if they have been strenuously concocted rather than emerging naturally and truly in the course of a comparison between fame in Ancient times and the present day.
- 2) The useful concept of 'attention capital' is applied from the work of Van Kriekan (2012). I use it here without maintaining any of the commitments to figurational sociology proselytized and observed by Van Kriekan.
- 3) Neither Gundle (2008) or Inglis (2010) approach the topic of celebrity via a Marxist perspective. Nonetheless, their work does place very high significance upon transformations in the economic base, especially the rise of industrialization, in the rise of celebrity culture.
- 4) In most accounts of the history of achieved celebrity, the role of mass communications and the democratization of politics are presented as pivotal

(Gundle 2008) and Inglis (2010).

- 5) Modernity is, of course, a multi-faceted phenomenon. The elevation of the transitional rather than the permanent as a feature of social relationships is combined with a restatement of Enlightenment values of rationality, justice and science. The contradictions between these two is the source of some of the major tensions in Modernity (Frisby 1986).
- 6) Gamson regards all four levels to interrelate. This is a useful corrective to 'top down' (culture industry) accounts which tend to over-state the power of industry and commodity over gossip, rumour and participation i.e. the power of the 'active audience'
- 7) According to Wolin (2008) contemporary democracies are 'managed democracies' organized around the principle of inverted totalitarianism' in which the appearance of equality and freedom disguise the decisive power of the state-corporate axis.
- 8) This is of course, the famous remark made by Lady Bracknell in respect of the birth circumstances of the main protagonist in Oscar Wilde's (1895) play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

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