



It's not hard to imagine a world where celebrities are just symbols that have lost their meaning, merely empty vessels inflated by Hollywood publicists as products to be ravenously consumed by an escapism-addicted public dissatisfied with their own lives. After all, this is our world. And now our world is reflected in the images populated by the celebrity doppelgangers and nearly Xeroxed politicians of photographer Alison Jackson's monograph *Confidential*, published by Taschen.

With synthetic paparazzi shots, faux nipple slips, and manufactured camera-phone snaps, Jackson satiates the reality-show voyeurism and suburban scopophilia that has come to define the early twenty-first century. The 264-page book showcases her full-page spreads of a corpulent Britney Spears attempting a sit-up, clips of film revealing the Queen affixing her bra and pantyhose,

and screen shots from a digital photo series of Tony Blair and George Bush country line dancing.

Jackson fills in the gaps of our imagined celebrity landscape and gives unbridled access to their most secret spaces: George Bush struggling with a Rubix cube in the Oval Office, Nicole Kidman with her knickers down, and Jack Nicholson water-sliding with two cheering, topless blondes. Her subjects are frequent tabloid and gossip fodder, and Jackson shows them stripped of their status, and even their clothes.

One of her muses is Paris Hilton (whose prison exploits piqued more international interest than coverage of the war in Iraq) exposed in situations both hyperbolized—receiving a manpedi from another inmate—and mundane, such as the snapshot of her first nude, bowlegged tiptoe into the prison shower.

Though these simulated situations are funny, it's obvious that they exist as an inversion of the inherent meaninglessness of celebrity. Jackson's photographs are loaded images overflowing with meaning. Like a mutation of the idea Jean Baudrillard espoused in *Impossible Exchange*—modern symbols, both living and inanimate, are becoming increasingly devoid of what they refer to—Jackson creates meaning for false images, finally contributing more value to the realm of falsehood than to the real.

Charles Glass, the storied former chief Middle East correspondent for ABC News, puts it best in one of the book's accompanying essays: "No age has designed and purveyed more distractions from reality than ours. Reality is perhaps too ugly for those who impose it on us and reap its benefits for them to market it as well." □