The phenomenon of celebrity, as we know it today, with its dazzling omnipresent stars, is inconceivable without photography. We live in the image.

Thanks to photographs, still or moving, the faces of a Paris or a Britney, a Di or a Camilla, are seared into our minds; they are the brands, and we are the branded.

With whose face are you more familiar today: your grandfather's face, or Bill Clinton's? This is all grist for Alison Jackson's mill.

Jackson is acutely aware of photography's complex codes, and revels in counterintelligence operations. She knows that it is a conceit of our age to believe that we have invented celebrity photography. The photography of the famous (the high and the low) began more or less with the invention of photography, and the codes have mutated constantly. A quick look back at celebrity photography may help us better appreciate Jackson's mischief.

It is a misconception to think that celebrity photography has always been about glamorizing and idealizing beauty. It clearly has been this at times—one only has to think of the heavily retouched glamour portraiture of the 1920s and 1930s—but modern tastes find such pictures risible. We want to believe that what we are looking at is natural. Earlier periods of photography have also, in the main, wanted imagery rooted in reality. In 1858 we read of Herbert Watkin's portraits of celebrities, which "will no doubt prove interesting to the general public who will be anxious to behold the lineaments of those about whom they may have heard or read much." People first wanted contact, familiarity; they just wanted to see. It is difficult to believe, yet true, that when photographs became affordable for the average person and therefore readily accessible, it was not uncommon for people to buy portraits of absolute strangers. For a brief moment, everybody (or anybody) was worth celebrating.

The photography of celebrities as we know it began with tiny, stiff *cartes de visite*, which were much like playing cards, and it was a measure of their novelty that they were collected and traded eagerly, as children do with their manga cards today. Strangely, however, it was the banal aspect of photography that elevated the modern celebrity to cosmic heights. In the century before photography, famous statesmen, dancers, writers, actors, and actresses were worshipped in highly idealized drawings and lithographs: leading ballerinas, for example, were depicted floating ethereally above the earth, with perfect pencil-point toes. Photography brought them down to earth with a thud. Those same dancers (up close and deprived of the artful *mise-en-scène* of the stage) appear in early daguerreotypes and *cartes de visite* as lumpy, earthbound creatures, hardly the stuff of dreams. Photographs wrecked illusions. Yet people couldn't get enough of them! They loved the fact that their idols were flawed, human. Photography brought a new warts-and-all intimacy, and disturbed the social order as well. We read that "gaping crowds" assembled in front of shop windows, where they were "delighted with such discordant elements of the social fabric as Nellie Farren and Lord Napier, the Bishop of Manchester and Miss Mabel Love"—that is, the high and the low, all brought to earth via photography.

The globalization, so to speak, of celebrity was evident as early as 1865. London's *Photographic News* reported that "an immense order from Japan has reached Paris for photographs of all the European royalties." The good news "spread like wildfire among photographers, and two hundred of them are on their way to that remote region." By 1870 the same magazine could conclude that "photography is becoming one of the most commonly recognized tests of popular interest in any person or thing, and the frequency with which a portrait is exhibited is regarded as the measure of the popularity or notoriety of the original."

By 1890 there was more sophistication on the part of the public, and a gossip columnist mocked the photographs of the Belgian royal family: "The Princess leans on the Prince in what is doubtless intended to represent an affectionate attitude, but the impression produced is that she is taking his measure for a coat." Where was this "democratic regard" of photography taking us? Surely, sniffed the writer, towards a "supreme negligence of order of any kind."

There was much anxiety about celebrity photography. It was noted that a new kind of female celebrity was emerging, one based neither on social class nor on classic beauty or attainment, but merely on being photogenic. A new term was invented—"the professional beauty." Celebrity photography was also seen as an invasion of privacy by many. In 1890 a certain Captain Illarinoff, a Russian, embarked on a European tour with a phonograph and a camera, hoping to make photographs of celebrities and record their words at the same time. A magazine article surmised that the Captain would probably end up with a photograph "of an irate celebrity ejecting him forcibly from his premises, accompanied by a phonographic record of what the celebrity said while doing so." (To 21st-century ears, this catastrophic scenario sounds all too familiar. Sadly, the good Captain seems to have disappeared from history, strangled or buried alive, perhaps, by his desperate cornered prey.)

Meanwhile, in England, a photograph of Prince William that was being exhibited in London shop windows had become the subject of much curiosity: "Prince William has a deformed arm, nearly dead, and finished off with a ball of flesh, kept in a pouch. In the photograph the left hand is concealed by the boy's cap, and there is nothing to show the deformity. ... The anxiety of the spectators to make out the shape of the hand is quite typical of the interest which anything concerning royalty, no matter how insignificant, creates." This observation, too, seems familiar!

But royalty came to tire of photography's incessant demands. Empress Eugenie, having learned the hard way that photographs didn't always flatter, had decided never again to "honour photographs with sittings." Alarmed,

WILLIAM EWING

The *Photographic News* hoped that "no member of our Royal Family will follow suit." But the same writer observed more presciently that, actually, "as long as the Queen allows herself to be photographed, it doesn't matter very much whether she appears in public or not." This lesson would be learned anew on the death of Princess Diana, when editors around the world realized that they had a vast enough repository of pictures to keep Diana "alive" for years.

The Prince and Princess of Wales were responsible for a modest scandal involving photography—in 1870. It appears that a royal baby had not acted regal enough during a portrait sitting, and an impatient Prince had suggested using any other baby, on the Alison Jackson-like principle that, to quote the Prince, "all babies of that age are alike!" Reporting the incident, the journalist suggested another alternative to the real thing: "a laughing, crying model made from india-rubber or other plastic and flexible material."

Jackson may be specifically addressing the cult of celebrity of the here-and-now, but clearly the issues she addresses are deeply rooted in photographic history. Princess Di is alive and well, photographically speaking. She has married Dodi, and the baby is beautiful. Don't we have a sublime studio portrait à la Lord Snowdon to prove it? And doesn't the adoring gaze Di gives her baby prove that she is a natural mother?

As Jackson well knows, photography does not just register. It amplifies and empowers. When people see a star in the flesh, they are almost always disappointed. "He is so small!" they often say. In one of the 19th-century accounts quoted earlier, the celebrity was called "the original," and the photograph a "pale copy." It would seem that the 21st century has reversed the equation: now the photograph appears to be the original, and the celebrity the pale copy. The best way for a celebrity to remain in the limelight today is to stay out of sight.

Alison Jackson could have resorted to electronic manipulation for her fictions, but that would have deprived the images of frisson: our delight is knowing that they are look-alikes, tempered with a nagging doubt: are we always sure? In an age of digital manipulation we'd be forgiven for assuming her cast of characters were pixelated avatars instead of look-alikes. In fact, Jackson delights in traditional photography, and especially its application in the domain of celebrity. She enjoys mocking the photograph's conventions and confusing its codes. Ironically, her photographs can claim objective, documentary status: there is no retouching, no darkroom trickery. She shows reality. It is we who bring to the work the fiction, willing these characters to be the gods and goddesses we crave.

William Ewing, *director of the Musée de l'Eysée, Lausanne, is a noted author and photography curator. His exhibitions have been shown at the Museum of Modern Art, the International Center of Photography, and many other museums and galleries worldwide. His most recent book is* Face: The New Photographic Portrait *(2006), and he is celebrated as author of* The Body *(1994).*

Ohne die Fotografie ist das Phänomen Berühmtheit, so, wie wir es heute erleben, mit all jenen strahlenden, omnipräsenten Stars, unvorstellbar. Wir leben in einer Bilderwelt. Ob durch Einzelaufnahmen oder bewegte Bilder, die Gesichter von Paris oder Britney, Diana oder Camilla prägen sich uns ein. Sie sind die Markenzeichen, wir die Gebrandmarkten. Wessen Gesicht, verehrter Leser, ist Ihnen heute vertrauter – das Ihres Großvaters oder das von Bill Clinton? Genau das ist Wasser auf die Mühlen von Alison Jackson.

Sie ist sich der komplexen Codes der Fotografie sehr bewusst und hat an Manövern der Spionageabwehr ihre wahre Freude. Sie weiß, dass wir uns einbilden, die Starfotografie sei eine Erfindung unseres Zeitalters. Doch das Ablichten berühmter Persönlichkeiten (höheren oder niederen Ranges) setzte mehr oder weniger bereits mit der Erfindung der Fotografie ein, und die Codes haben sich unablässig verändert. Ein kurzer Blick zurück auf die Geschichte der Fotografie berühmter Menschen mag uns helfen, Alison Jacksons Streiche auch wirklich zu würdigen.

Es ist irrig zu meinen, bei der Fotografie von Berühmtheiten habe stets die Verherrlichung und Idealisierung von Schönheit im Mittelpunkt gestanden. Zu gewissen Zeiten war dies tatsächlich der Fall – man denke nur an die Glamourporträts der 1920er und 1930er Jahre –, doch vom heutigen Gesichtspunkt aus betrachtet wirken wirken solche Bilder lächerlich. Wir wiegen uns gerne in dem Glauben, dass alles, was wir betrachten, ganz natürlich ist. Auch in den frühen Jahren der Fotografie war man schon im Wesentlichen bestrebt, die Bildsprache in der Realität zu verankern. 1858 war zu Herbert Watkins Porträts von Berühmtheiten zu lesen, sie seien „zweifellos von Interesse für das allgemeine Publikum, das darauf bedacht ist, sich die Gesichtszüge der Menschen einzuprägen, von denen es so viel gehört oder gelesen hat." In erster Linie ging es den Leuten um einen Kontakt, um Vertrautheit, sie wollten einfach etwas fürs Auge. Man mag es kaum glauben, doch es stimmt: Als Fotografien für jedermann erschwinglich und damit leichter zugänglich wurde, war es nichts Ungewöhnliches, dass