

Bookends Photography

At Tate Modern's massive photography show this summer, it often looked as if the only two major tendencies in twentieth-century photography were, on the one hand, a grippingly banal intimacy whose patron saint was Walker Evans, with his haunting record of America's poor during the Depression era, and, on the other, a haughty impersonalism schooled on the melancholic architectural studies of Bernd and Hilla Becher. As if to prove that such apparently crude distinctions can still conceal the most complex of actual works, two of the photographers curiously missing from 'Cruel and Tender' are the subjects of ravishing retrospective collections. Nan Goldin and Candida Hofer may be continents apart in terms of subject matter, but they are similarly rigorous with colour, surface and light, making them equally moving.

'The Devil's Playground' (Phaidon £45) collects over two decades of Goldin's fearless project of recording the emotional lives of herself, her lovers and social circle. At times in the years between 'The Ballad of Sexual Dependency' (1979) and 'Self-Portrait in Delirium, The Priory, London' (2002), it has sometimes looked as if Goldin's lurid world of frenzied or weary couplings, drugged ages and last days of dying loved ones was as aesthetically trapped as the lives she recorded were really locked into dead-eyed anomie. But 'The Devil's Playground' is also testament to a community of loved and loving bodies. A photograph like 'Valerie and Bruno Having Sex', with its blurred details of bones and bruises, is practically saintly in its evidence of everyday ecstasy. Goldin's late turn to family groups (maybe her subjects are just getting on, and getting over all that panic-edged self-absorption) even includes a Madonna and child.

'Candida Hofer: the Monograph' (Thames & Hudson £40) proposes an entirely depopulated universe of the most gorgeous interiors. A student of the Bechers' school of industrial grandeur, Hofer is perhaps best known for her photographs of zoos, where the animals appear to be mere glum afterthoughts to the institutional architecture. Here, she turns to other institutions, public spaces devoid of a public. Most extraordinary of all are her depictions of library interiors: an exquisite taxonomy of shelving designs, desk lamps, hushed arrangements of tables and chairs. Hofer is in love with the pure tactility of these spaces, capable of finding a weird poetry in the most apparently utilitarian



designs. Rows of card catalogues stretch across a classical foyer like sinisterly waiting train carriages; lecture theatres look like the interiors of fantastic spacecraft; crowds of classical statues are stranded above phalanxes of stylish seating, posing for an invisible audience.

A less rarefied architecture looms from the pages of Philippe Garner's **'Seaside Album: Photography and Memory'** (Philip Wilson £25), a glorious album of photographic reminiscences of Brighton, as far as you can get from the usual local-book-for-local-people seaside nostalgia. Brighton has been blessed with the most esteemed of photographic witnesses. Fox Talbot first photographed the orientalist tat of the Pavilion in 1846. Bill Brandt's 'Brighton Belle' (1935) is a pure joy, with her 'I'm no angel' hat; Cartier-Bresson's 'Girl in an Amusement Arcade' has more than the 'Hi-Ball' machine on her mind. Here too is an intriguing record of how crowds behaved at mid-century: happily regimented along the pier, crammed but respectable.

The crowds in **'Red-Color News Soldier'** (Phaidon £24.95) are distinctly menacing, all the more so as the spectacles they're attending – the vicious 'self-criticism' sessions of the Chinese Cultural Revolution – seem to spark such collective pleasure at the discovery and punishment of so-called class enemies. Photographer Li Zhensheng caught the mounting fervour of Mao Zedong's late bid for renewed power in a collection of images that, in their brutal record of humiliations, beatings and executions, stand as a grim photographic riposte to the vision of Mao's China that is everywhere here: the airbrushed Chairman's face pasted into a nation's visual imagination. Odd, then, that Phaidon should have chosen to package such an essential volume in a sort of Maoist kitsch (complete with shiny red cover like Mao's little book), as if the material and visual culture of repression were just some neatly retro livery.

Brian Dillon



'Charlie Johnson in the Flames'

Michael Ignatieff

Chatto & Windus £12.99

The word 'elegiac' might have been invented for this thoughtful, but curiously unmoving piece of work. The Charlie Johnson of the title is a grizzled war journalist, who is suddenly impelled by grief and horror when he witnesses the murder of a woman who has sheltered him and his team outside Belgrade. The novel deals with his attempt to achieve redemption as he tracks down the monster.

One problem with this novel is that there are too many stereotypes: the amoral Colonel who commits the central atrocity; the watery-eyed henchman (referred to, noirishly, as Watery Eyes); even Charlie, the hack whose domestic life is falling apart. Despite his heroic impulses, Charlie is an unlikeable character. He leaves his family in the lurch, fucks up his chances with desirable colleague Etta, and is a pain in the arse to the people he calls his friends – I couldn't help thinking of Henry from 'Drop the Dead Donkey'. You come away unconvinced that Charlie, a seasoned veteran of such Balkan outrages, would suddenly go loopy over a death which, as the Colonel remarks, Britain and America might politely refer to as 'collateral damage'.

I really wanted to like this. I admire Ignatieff's prose, especially when dealing with the decay of Charlie's relationship with his wife, and the frisson that exists between him and Etta. But, ultimately, the book is hoist by its own petard: 'All the redemption there could be was in a story, but it had to be a good one, a new one, and the story he had fallen for was tired and old.'

Conrad Williams



'Who Killed Daniel Pearl?'

Bernard-Henri Lévy

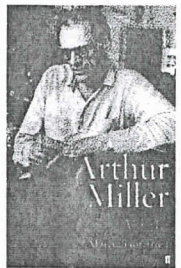
Duckworth £20

Bernard-Henri Lévy finished his investigation into the kidnapping and murder in Pakistan of the American journalist Daniel Pearl while the US invasion of Iraq was in full spate. Lévy

opposed that intervention, not because he was indifferent to the deliverance of the Iraqi people from tyranny, because his research had convinced him that the war against terror had taken wrong turn; that it is in the 'black hole of Karachi', not in Baghdad, that radical Islamists are preparing for an apocalyptic confrontation with the West.

The Pearl case, Lévy argues, is an invitation to Western intellectuals: political leaders finally to abandon postures of the Cold War and acknowledge the 'grand struggle' of the twenty-first century for what it is: Lévy's reckoning with the threat posed by radical Islam forms the moral core of his book, around which he weaves a stinging and disconcerting story of official complicity in Pearl's slaughter. He claims that Omar Sheikh, the British-born convict of murdering Pearl, was an agent of the ISI, the Pakistani intelligence services. Furthermore, he accuses that the Islamist groupuscule to which Sheikh belonged was in fact run by the factions involved in a violent struggle for control of the ISI. Finally and most terrifyingly of all, Lévy accuses that Pearl was killed because had begun to untangle the relations between Pakistani intelligence and Qaeda, and had uncovered a traffic of nuclear secrets between Islamabad and the Taliban. These are conjectures rather than hard conclusions, however. And one is left wondering what Lévy's insistence that everything in the story 'converges' is not so much a statement of fact as a profession of faith.

Jonathan Derbyshire



'Arthur Miller: A Life'

Martin Gottfried

Faber £25

Playwright Arthur Miller has had a more eventful life than most dramatists: as a boy he suffered the lethal effects of the economic slump in the 1930s was hauled up in front of the House American Activities Committee in 1950; and, most famously, he married Marilyn Monroe, an unlikely if by alliance that provoked hysteria in the 'n' Becks proportions on both sides of the Atlantic. The playwright's fall from Broadway favour was intimately connected with 'After the Fall', which appeared to put Monroe onstage almost immediately after her death. It was until far too late that a panic-stricken Miller rang his producer, concerned that people would see a connection between the star and his leading character – fact that director Elia Kazan had put actress in a blonde wig hardly helped.

Gottfried is a New York drama critic and he writes most tellingly about Miller's fraught relationship with Broadway, and with Kazan, who c