

human rights, and then start thinking of himself as part of one of the world's great peoples, he will see he has a case for the United Nations.

I can't think of a better case! Four hundred years of black blood and sweat invested here in America, and the white man still has the black man begging for what every immigrant fresh off the ship can take for granted the minute he walks down the gangplank.

But I'm digressing. I told the Englishman that my alma mater was books, a good library. Every time I catch a plane, I have with me a book that I want to read — and that's a lot of books these days. If I weren't out here every day battling the white man, I could spend the rest of my life reading, just satisfying my curiosity — because you can hardly mention anything I'm not curious about. I don't think anybody ever got more out of going to prison than I did. In fact, prison enabled me to study far more intensively than I would have if my life had gone differently and I had attended some college. I imagine that one of the biggest troubles with colleges is there are too many distractions, too much panty-raiding, fraternities, and boola-boola and all of that. Where else but in a prison could I have attacked my ignorance by being able to study intensely sometimes as much as fifteen hours a day?

For Discussion and Writing

1. How did the process by which Malcolm learned to read differ from the typical way people learn to read?
2. In "Learning to Read," Malcolm tells us that he learned to read by teaching himself. What else did he teach himself while he taught himself to read?
3. **connections** What are the parallels between the ways Malcolm and Frederick Douglass, in "Learning to Read and Write" (p. 129), learned to read? What are the parallels and differences in the things they learned from their reading?
4. Though Malcolm changed many of his views after the time covered in this portion of his autobiography, the project of recovering African history remained important to him and remains important to this day to many African Americans. How do you react to his claims about African history?

BILL MCKIBBEN

Curbing Nature's Paparazzi

Bill McKibben (b. 1960) is a writer and environmentalist. He started out at the New Yorker but has also written for the New York Times, the Atlantic Monthly, Harper's, the New York Review of Books, National Geographic, and Rolling Stone. His many books include The End of Nature (1989), which helped popularize the notion of climate change; The Age of Missing Information (1992); and Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future (2007).

"Curbing Nature's Paparazzi," which first appeared in Harper's, is typical of much of McKibben's work in that it tries to understand its subject not as an isolated phenomenon but as the product of a number of forces and as part of an interconnected web of phenomena. It is also representative of McKibben's writing in that it not only analyzes and interprets but also advocates. One of the things to watch for as you read is the mix of these modes.

The art of wildlife photography employs quite a few people scattered around the country. Filmmakers supply hour upon hour of video for PBS, the major networks, and cable channels. Still photographers take pictures for magazines, calendars, books, and advertisements, and they market countless trips for amateurs and aspiring professionals, teaching them the tricks of the trade. Their images do a lot of good: from Flipper and Jacques Cousteau to the mountain lion nuzzling her kit on your latest mailing from an environmental group, they've helped change how we see the wild. I've seen neighbors of mine, who had no use for wolves, begin to melt during a slide show about the creatures. It is no great exaggeration to say that dolphin-safe tuna flows directly from the barrel of a Canon, that without Kodak there'd be no Endangered Species Act.

But it's not a completely benign enterprise. In the wild, photographers often need to subtly harass wildlife to get their shots: to

camp near watering holes, say, where their very presence may unnerve and scatter creatures. Worse, and less recognized, is a sort of conceptual problem. After a lifetime of exposure to nature shows and magazine photos, we arrive at the woods conditioned to expect splendor and are surprised when the parking lot does not contain a snarl of animals mating and killing one another. Because the only images we see are close-ups, we've lost much of our sense of the calm and quotidian beauty of the natural world, of the fact that animals are usually preoccupied with hiding or wandering around looking for food.

There is something frankly pornographic about the animal horror videos (*Fangs!*) marketed on late-night TV, and even about some of the shots you see in something as staid as *Natural History* magazine. Here is an emerald boa eating a parrot — the odds, according to the photographers I talked to, were “jillions to one” that it was a wild shot. Indeed, the photographer who took it boasted to *People* magazine about how, in order to get other dramatic shots, he'd spray-painted ferrets to convert them to the endangered blackfooted kind, and how he'd hoisted tame and declawed jaguars into tree branches for good shots, and starved piranhas so that they would attack with great ferocity. Another photographer took a game stab at defending the shot of the emerald boa munching the parrot: “It very graphically illustrates the relationship between higher and lower vertebrates,” he said. So it does, but that's a little like saying that Miss September graphically illustrates the development of the mammary gland in *Homo sapiens*.

Even worse, perhaps, is the way the constant flow of images undercuts the sense that there's actually something wrong with the world. How can there really be a shortage of whooping cranes when you've seen a thousand images of them, seen ten times more images than there are actually whooping cranes left in the wild? We're rarely shown a photograph of the empty trees where there are no baboons anymore; whatever few baboons remain are dutifully pursued until they're captured on film, and even if all the captions are about their horrid plight, the essential message of the picture remains: baboons.

At this point we could — indeed we should — start talking about a new ethic. People have tried, from time to time, to promul-

gate ethics for most of the arts, and nature photography is no exception. Photographer Daniel Dancer, writing recently in *Wild Earth* magazine, suggested using photos for advocacy purposes — shooting the clear-cut next to the forest, for instance. One editor envisions sending a photographer out to document, say, the hourly life of a snake rather than a young grizzly striking poses at a game farm. Reading and talking to such thinkers, though, it's easy to find a note of resignation — the deep suspicion that such rhetoric is not going to affect very quickly or very profoundly the marketplace in which photographers operate.

“A big problem we see is an editor who says, ‘I want this kind of picture,’ and then the word gets out,” says Chuck Jonkel of the Wildlife Film Festival. “Editors will say, ‘Give us a picture of a caribou running full tilt, and we'll give you \$1,700.’ Someone's going to hire a helicopter and run the shit out of the caribou to get that \$1,700. I don't blame the photographer for that — I blame the editors.” If one photographer or editor falters, chances are that there will be another to take his place. Dancer offers the wise advice of Wendell Berry that “one must begin in one's own life the private solutions that can only in turn become public solutions.” That is so. But my work on environmental issues has made me wary of completely private solutions, for the momentum of our various tragedies makes the slow conversion of small parts of the society insufficient. Aren't we ethically impelled to also try to imagine ways that such private solutions might turn into public and widespread practice?

It's precisely for that reason that wildlife photography interests me so much. It's a small enough world that, at least for purposes of argument, you could postulate real changes. Suppose the eight or nine magazines that run most of the nature photos and the three or four top TV nature shows formed among them a cooperative, or clearinghouse, for wildlife images and announced that, up to a certain date, anyone could mail them as many slides or reels of film as they wished. *And after that date they wouldn't take any new submissions*. Then, when the editors of *Natural History* decided they needed some elephant photos, the staff of the cooperative agency could send over a wide array to choose from. For the fact is, there are already plenty of elephant photos in the world (when *Wildlife Conservation Magazine* was planning a piece on elephants a few years ago, its editors reviewed ten thousand slides).

And since most of the competing magazines and TV shows would belong to the cooperative, commercial pressure might diminish; no one else would have a two-inch-away close-up of the golden tamarind monkey either.

If some member of the consortium had a good reason for needing a new picture — if there were a new species or a new behavior that needed illustrating, or someone was needed to accompany a scientific expedition — then the cooperative could assign a photographer, along with strict instructions about conduct: about, say, how far away to stay from the animals. These measures might solve some of the ethical problems surrounding the industry's treatment of animals. It's also possible that such a cooperative agency could eventually begin to deal with the larger questions — for instance, over time, it could cull from its stock extreme close-ups and other kinds of photos that miseducate viewers about the natural world. It's the kind of place where a new ethic might *adhere*, might grow into something powerful.

Imagining institutions allows you to test the strength of the ethic on which they're based against very real and practical objections. In this case, the most obvious drawback is that the cooperative would put photographers out of work or force them to find new subjects, for if the agency worked as planned, it would need very few new wildlife photos annually. This potential clearing-house for wildlife photos would announce, in effect: "We've got enough images now; we can recycle them more or less forever; please don't bother taking any more." And since negatives don't really degrade with use, that would be that. But this, we intuitively feel, is not fair. Who am I, or you, to tell someone else how he can or can't make a living?

It is an almost unknown thing in our society to say, "That's enough." And it sounds especially heretical in any creative endeavor. The word "censorship" rises unbidden to one's lips. And even if you can convince yourself that it's not really censorship (it's not the government, after all; it's no more than some magazine telling you that it won't print your story for whatever damn reason; it's editing), even so, it seems repressive. It is repressive. It's the imposition of a new taboo. Consumers aren't supposed to have taboos; they're supposed to consume. And consume we do: not just goods and services but images, ideas, knowledge. Nothing is off-limits. So there's something a little creepy about saying,

"We'll be buying no new photos of wildebeests. We don't think it's a good idea to be taking them." Do we really want any new taboos?

As I've become more interested in environmental matters, I've thought a lot about these questions of restraint — about when one's curiosity or creative impulse can be bane as well as boon, about whether there are places where taboos once more make sense. The answers are easier to see when the questions concern things, not ideas. Clearly, for instance, we'd be better off environmentally if as a culture we frowned on automobiles, if we said that the freedom they afforded was not worth the cost in terms of global warming, suburban sprawl, and so forth. And a taboo against the next, ever-larger version of the Ford Explorer, even if it somehow developed, wouldn't seem a real threat to the human spirit.

But the debate about limiting ideas is one we're incapable of having, because we operate under the assumption that the limitation of creativity is repellent. We take as a given that we should find out everything we can, develop everything we can, photograph and write about everything we can, and then let the marketplace decide what to do with it. By definition, therefore, if it sells it is good. If we can clone animals, say, then we will; to suggest otherwise is to stand against not only free enterprise but also the free imagination. But in our blind defense of these things that seem "right," we may be short-circuiting the process of thinking things through as a culture, leaving ourselves no way to entertain the possibility of restraint.

And yet self-restraint is a uniquely human capacity, belonging as exclusively to us as flight belongs to the birds. It's the one gift no other creature possesses — even as a possibility.

For Discussion and Writing

1. Why would most readers of nature magazines (or watchers of nature television) be surprised to find that many of the images they encounter are staged or in some other way artificial? Why would they be bothered?
2. McKibben imagines a counterfactual, a thing that does not exist, to support his argument — "a photograph of the empty trees where there are no baboons anymore" (par. 4). What do you think of this move in