

**Photographs  
that  
make  
you  
think.**



# **ANIMALS**

**Henry Carroll**





## Does visual language limit our view of the natural world?

We begin with a crab in Emilio Vavarella's film *Animal Cinema*. It appears to be burrowing into patchy dry ground before turning its attention to us. When we are pulled into the hole, we find

ourselves underwater, entwined in the tentacles of an octopus. Its suckers gently explore the camera as we travel across the seabed. Tentacles become the paddling

legs of a dog. As we reach shore, dangling from its mouth, we enter a whirling frenzy before being laid to rest. A nose sniffs its way into the frame. It belongs to a grizzly bear. The bear offers us an uncomfortably close encounter with the inside of its mouth, its jaws dripping with hunger, as if it can smell us, the audience, through the lens. From there we hitch a ride across a grassy plain—courtesy of a lion—and are subsequently accelerated up a tree, our journey taking us higher and higher into the ever-narrowing branches, thanks to the dexterity of a gray squirrel. And so continues Vavarella's film, in which he used YouTube footage of



animals taking control of cameras planted in the wild to place our gaze at the mercy of the natural world.

The footage has a childlike playfulness, the product of someone, or something, that has not learned, or been limited by, the dos and don'ts of visual language. Compositions of strange, unfamiliar beauty and long, uninterrupted shots adhere to a different kind of narrative, one that could take us anywhere for unexplained reasons. In the hands of a human, a camera is political, a subjective means to show what is and what is not important; but in the mouths, tentacles, or claws of creatures, politics is dispensed with and the camera becomes a tool for an entirely different purpose—whether that's food, material to make a nest, or an object of play. Even a remote camera that records animals unaware has been consciously placed in position, its frame composed so that the animals fit within an accepted aesthetic framework. With *Animal Cinema*, Vavarella takes us on a magical journey. Though the film seems haphazard and messy at first, when the humor subsides, we come to realize that the animals have a purely reactive, instinctual view of the world that humans could only hope to achieve.



## See through the eyes of a new generation of photographers

responding to the rapidly unfolding issues shaping our lives. In this series of small, insightful, and beautifully presented books, Henry Carroll, the best-selling photography writer of the last decade, considers the ideas behind images to present personal perspectives on climate change, race, sexuality, gender, faith, inequality, beauty, power, and our contradictory relationship to the natural world. Carroll presents the photographers as modern-day philosophers, original thinkers who fuse technique, concept, and imagination in order to provoke meaningful visual reflections on what matters most.



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Hummingbird* (*Amazilia tzacatl*), 2012

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