

# **Camera Obscura**

**Number 24  
1990**

Reprinted with the permission of the original publisher  
by  
**Periodicals Service Company**  
Germantown, NY  
2004

Printed on acid-free paper.

This reprint was reproduced from the  
best original edition copy available.

**NOTE TO THE REPRINT EDITION:**

In some cases full page advertisements which do not add to  
the scholarly value of this volume have been omitted.  
As a result, some reprinted volumes may have irregular pagination.

Editors: Janet Bergstrom, Elisabeth Lyon, Constance Penley,  
Lynn Spigel, Sharon Willis

Associate Editors: Denise Mann (on leave)

Advisory Editors: Bertrand Augst, Elizabeth Cowie, Mary Ann  
Doane, Laura Mulvey, Linda Orr, Susan Suleiman

Editorial Assistants: June Miller and Alice Powell, (Susan B.  
Anthony Center, University of Rochester)

Thanks to: Scott Bryson, Evlyn Gould, Barbara London,  
Asahi Publications, Shuntaro Tanikawa, Steve Fagin, Doug Hall,  
Akiko Iimura, Bay Area Video Coalition, The Museum of  
Modern Art, Musée National d'Art Moderne  
(Centre Georges Pompidou), Christine Van Assche,  
Paul-Emmanuel Odin, Jessica Allan (Art Resource, New York),  
Carol Lafayette, Thomas Lyons (Metro Pictures, New York).

Cover photo: from the videotape scenario for *Sauve qui peut*  
(*la vie*) [*Every Man for Himself*] (Jean-Luc Godard, 1980). Photo:  
Paul-Emmanuel Odin. Design: Carol Lafayette and Elisabeth Lyon.

## CAMERA OBSCURA

ISSN 0270-5346

Number 24 • September 1990

Copyright © 1991 by The Johns Hopkins University Press

All rights reserved. No portion of this journal may be reproduced by any process or technique without the formal consent of The Johns Hopkins University Press. Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by The Johns Hopkins University Press for libraries and other users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) Transactional Reporting Service, provided that the base fee of \$1.00 per article is paid directly to CCC, 27 Congress Street, Salem, MA 01970. This consent does not extend to other kinds of copying, such as copying for general distribution, for advertising or promotional purposes, for creating new collective works, or for resale. 0270-5346/88 \$01.00 + \$.10

*Camera Obscura* is published by The Johns Hopkins University Press for the University of Rochester. *Camera Obscura* is funded in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts, and with support from Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

*Camera Obscura* is indexed in *Alternative Press Index*, *Arts and Humanities Citation Index*, *Film Literature Index*, *International Index to Film Periodicals*, *International Index to Television Periodicals*, and *Studies on Women's Abstracts*. Numbers 1 through 12 are available on microfilm from University Publications of America, 44 N. Market Street, Frederick, MD 21701.

Address manuscripts and editorial correspondence to The Editors, *Camera Obscura*, Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY 14627.

Address subscription and business correspondence to The Johns Hopkins University Press, Journals Publishing Division, 701 W. 40th Street, Suite 275, Baltimore, MD 21211.

Published three times a year in January, May, and September. Annual subscriptions: \$18.50, individuals; \$37.00, institutions. Foreign postage: \$6.00, Canada and Mexico; \$6.00, outside North America.

Typeset by Capitol Communications, Crofton, MD. Printed at The Sheridan Press, Hanover, PA. This journal is printed on acid-free paper. The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984. ♾

Postmaster: send address changes to *Camera Obscura*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 701 W. 40th Street, Suite 275, Baltimore, Maryland 21211-2190.

# camera obscura

*A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory*/24

## Unspeakable Images

Special Issue Editors: Elisabeth Lyon and Raymond Bellour

### Editors' Introductions

- 5 The Unspeakable by Elisabeth Lyon
- 7 The Power of Words, The Power of Images  
by Raymond Bellour
- 11 Reading the Figural by D.N. Rodowick
- 47 "The Occidental Tourist": Steve Fagin's Virtual Voyage for  
Armchair Travelers by Vivian Sobchack
- 65 L'Imparfait de l'Objectif: The Imperfect of the Object Glass  
by Ann Banfield
- 89 History in Perspective, Perspective in History: A Commentary  
on L'Origine de la perspective by Hubert Damisch  
by Dana Polan
- 99 The Film Stilled by Raymond Bellour
- 125 Site Re:cite by Gary Hill
- 139 From the Photogram to the Pictogram: On Chris Marker's  
La Jetée by Réda Bensmaïa
- 163 Working Papers by Thierry Kuntzel
- 169 Unspeakable Images, Unspeakable Bodies  
by Elisabeth Lyon
- 195 *Video Letter*: An Introduction by Barbara London
- 198 *Video Letter* by Shuntaro Tanikawa and Shuji Terayama
- 207 "The Letter goes on . . ." by Raymond Bellour
  
- 216 Contributors

*Video Letter* by Shuntaro Tanikawa  
and Shuji Terayama  
An Introduction  
*Barbara London*

Recognized as two of Japan's preeminent poets, Shuntaro Tanikawa and Shuji Terayama have consistently explored new means of self-expression. For more than thirty years, they have experimented with the most traditional Japanese literary forms, working on the edges of convention with an active group of interdisciplinary artists in Tokyo. Both men responded to the radical energy and politics of Japan in the late 1950s in very powerful and remarkably similar ways, despite their different backgrounds: Tanikawa was born in Tokyo in 1931, the son of a venerated philosopher; Terayama was born in 1935 in the cold, dark northern province of Aomori and, without a father, had a close bond with his mother. Long-time friends, their collaboration began in the early 1960s when they wrote their first poetry together.

Tanikawa has worked with such traditional forms as "renga" (the linked poem) and "haiku" since the 1950s, as well as with sonnets and free verse. His writing has also been closely associated with visual imagery. Early in his career he received commissions to create poetry directly in response to photographs taken by artists, and over the years he has written scripts for film, radio, and television, as well as texts for illustrated children's books. Tanikawa has a fascination for technical gadgets and in his teens began experimenting with cameras—initially still photography then 8mm and 16mm film. In the late 1960s he obtained his first video camera and recording deck—the early and somewhat clumsy 1/2-inch open-reel video system. He liked the immediacy of being able to play back the just-recorded images and of capturing sound and visuals simultaneously. He has continued to use consumer video and also works with sound, producing records and audiotapes, including readings of his poetry, which is uncommon in Japan.

Terayama, although also a theater director and writer, is most famous in Japan for his distinguished "tanka" poetry, which he began writing in his early twenties during a year-long stay in a hospital where he was being treated for a chronic kidney ailment. Very conscious of his own mortality, for the rest of his life Terayama worked compul-

sively. He put his poetry into action with Tenjo Sajiki, the guerilla theater that he started in the Shibuya section of Tokyo in the early 1960s. Always open to new ideas, he drew his inspiration for “tanka” from writing and talking with people in coffee shops and in the theater. He experimented with dance, rock music, and film and became something of a guru attracting a curious assortment of collaborators, including his mother. Terayama was popular with younger audiences and he published many essays, plays, and poems in paperback. Although the literary establishment did not always take his underground, “hippie” style of essay writing seriously, his book, *Sho o suteyo Machi e deyo* (“Throw away Your Books, Let’s Go into the Streets”), became something of a cult classic because it encouraged students to stop their study through rote memorization and to think on their own. Some schools prohibited students from reading the book, and considered Terayama to be desperate character and a bad influence.

In 1982, Katsue Tomiyama and Nobuhiro Kawanaka, co-founders of Image Forum (the experimental film/video center in Tokyo that publishes the film magazine of the same name), suggested that Tanikawa and Terayama jointly create a “video letter.” The initial idea was to publish transcripts with stills of the work-in-progress in the monthly *Asahi Camera*. Chapters one through ten were published and are reprinted here.

With encouragement from both Image Forum and Asahi publishing, Tanikawa and Terayama began their video exchange. Tanikawa worked alone with his home video equipment; Terayama used a borrowed Sony system operated by an assistant. Their main principle was not to edit their individual letters, but to compose directly, intuitively, paying attention to the speed and flow of their unfolding ideas. As a kind of conversation in which spontaneity is central, *Video Letter* is close to “renga” poetry. Both are improvisations and are meant to represent an experience at the moment of articulation. What is expressed is connected to what precedes; either directly or more indirectly if, for example, the subject matter has changed. “Renga” is written in short but complete verses, one poet answering another’s just finished lines. While the form does have distinct rules and parameters, there is considerable room for imagination and innovation. Composed either by participants sitting in the same room together or apart through correspondence, “renga” was elevated to a high literary form during the 17th century by Matsuo Bashō and his followers. After a hundred-year hiatus, the form is somewhat in renaissance today. A “renga” series written by Tanikawa with other Japanese and European poets was recently published in West Germany.

What makes *Video Letter* such an extraordinary tape is that Terayama and Tanikawa combined a venerated literary form with the most rudimentary consumer video equipment and moved far beyond the limitations of traditional Japanese artistic vocabulary, the abstract and external subject matter of *ka-cho-fu-getsu* (flowers, birds, wind, and moon). The videotape has clarity as well as an underlying sadness and poignancy, partly due to Terayama's illness and subsequent death. Concluded and assembled by Tanikawa, who edited out some sections and added audio dubbing, *Video Letter* became a kind of epitaph or mourning poem for Terayama. The work quietly closes with a slow pan of Terayama's final electrocardiogram (stolen from the hospital by Tanikawa), as the pulsating line representing his heartbeat quiets and becomes straight. The videotape then ends with an image of a poem by Terayama posted on a pole by the sea:

20 years old. In May I was born  
 I tread on the leaves  
 and read young horse chestnuts  
 Now is the time  
 At the entry to my season  
 Bashfully towards birds  
 I raise my arm  
 20 years old. In May I was born.

We are grateful to Mr. H. Sato of Asahi Shimbun (Tokyo) for permission to reprint *Video Letter* (work-in-progress) from *Asahi Camera* and to Akiko Iimura for the English translation of the text which appears on pages 204–205 of this issue.





谷川俊太郎と寺山修司の

# ビデオレター

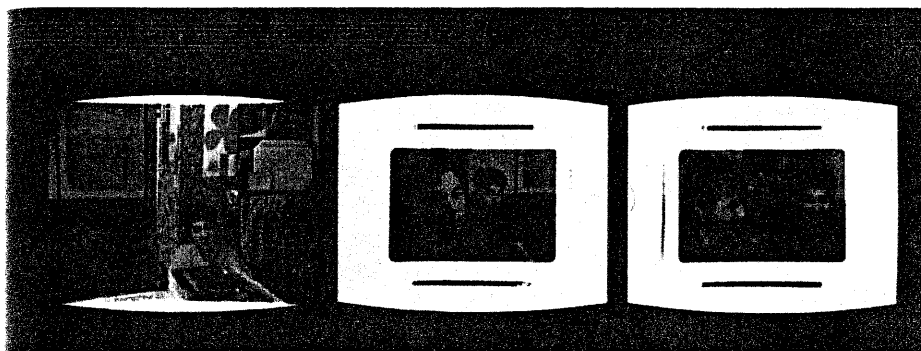


谷川俊太郎さんと寺山修司さんに「ビデオ書簡」をお願いした。谷川さんと寺山さんは、もう二十五年來の友人。相手のことは互いに知りつくしている関係だ。

だけど、なれ合いはない。言葉、音、意味、無意味をめぐってスリリングなイメージがテープに収められた。

古い写真、ありのままの自分、飾りのない美しい書簡を、誌上初公開。

なお、この作品は東京・池袋西武スタジオ70で開かれる第二回実験映画祭（12月4日・12日）で公開されます。



from TANIKAWA to TERAMAYA  
**VOL1**

オムニバスに収録された

オムニバスに収録された、その後の活動の軌跡

古い写真がててきたよ

ネオパンスの コイデカメラの

一九六〇年 六月

武満徹といっしょの

古い写真が ててきた

朝日新聞に載った新しい詩

よかったぜ

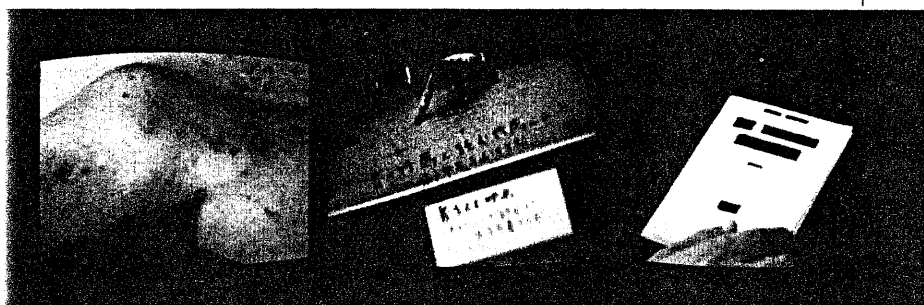
ちよつと田村隆一風だったけど

言葉でいうと、

なんだかちよつとみんな

格好すぎるような気がするけどね

オムニバスに収録された、その後の活動の軌跡



from TERAMAYA to TANIKAWA  
**VOL2**

九月十日 ビデオの使ひ ありがとう

谷川さんは

言葉にすると

なんでも格好よくなってしまうというけど

言葉にしろしないと 堪えきれないってこと

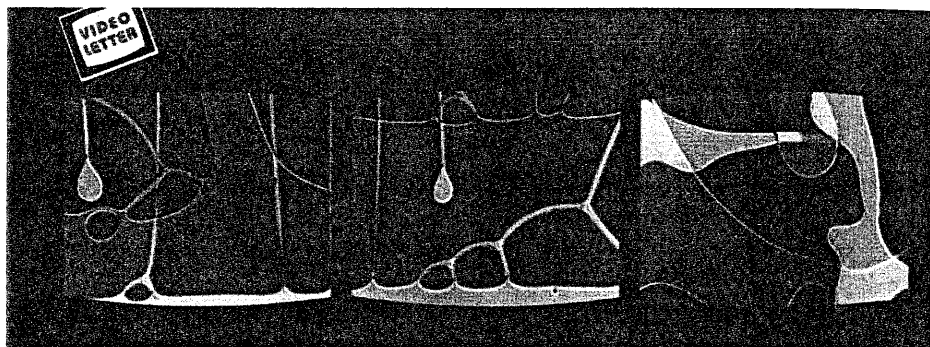
とどこまである

これが

これが

これが

これが 僕の近況です



from TANIKAWA to TERAKAWA  
VOL3

水の音が減れる

つまり えーッ あのさあ

んーん なんていうのかなあ そのお

やっぱりそのお けっさよくね ンーん

えーッ

うんとお。 すごく つまりい

あいまいな といえはいいか

かたがたない といえはいいか

ま ながれているわけね

そのおー ながれているっていうことのなかに

なんか その あれがあるってことかな

バックにはか同のことが減る



from TERAKAWA to TANIKAWA  
VOL4

消えろ 消えろ 消えろ 消えろ 消えろ

消えろ 消えろ 消えろ 消えろ 消えろ

九月十五日

谷川さん 言葉がたくさんありますがどう

でも 問題は

言葉が「文字」でも「音声」でもなく

「意味」だということですが

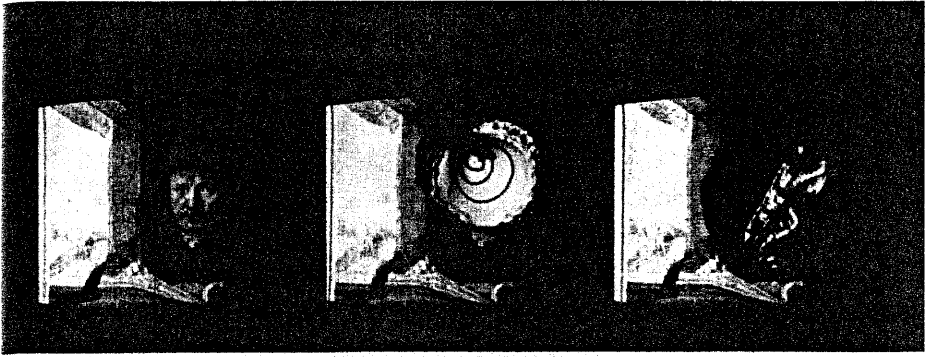
「意味」だけが

減びかけているもの

壊れかけているものを

建てなおすことができます

鳥の言葉



from TANIKAWA to TERAKAWA  
**VOL5**

バックにパロッド音が流れる

意 プラス（味）という

この言葉自体のうちに

〈意味〉の意味する

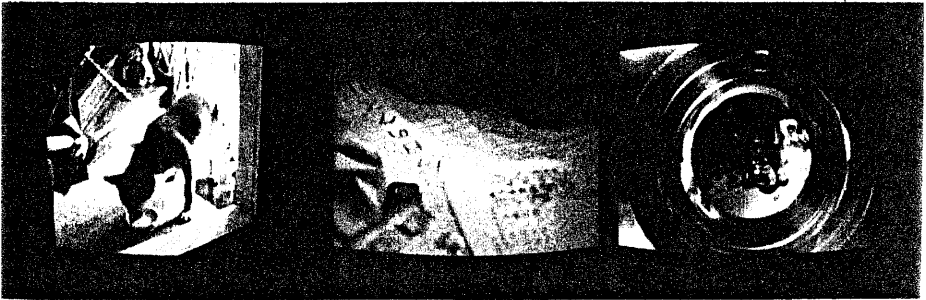
一種の身体性ともいう

べきものがかくれてる

とは思いませんか？

意味は必ずしも論理

だけじゃない……



from TERAKAWA to TANIKAWA  
**VOL6**

九月十八日 朝  
おはようございます

バックに國定本洋子のテーマ音楽が流れる

谷川さん

〈無意味〉について考え

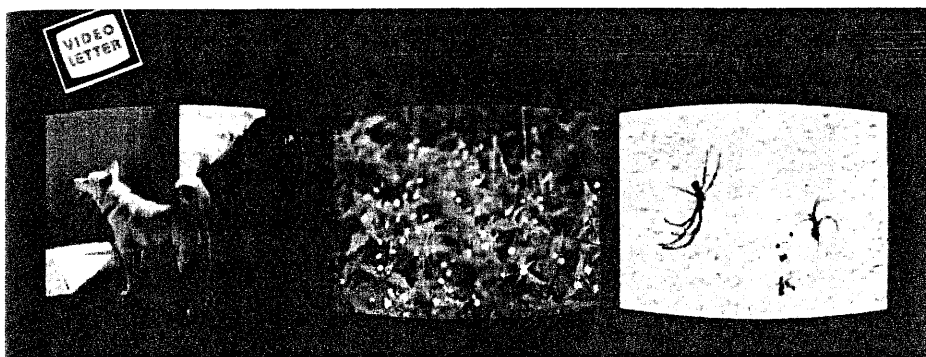
意味も論理も、書き手だけの

ない。半分は受け手が作り出す

ないでしょうか

空島市紙に書かれた文字 語がおぼろ  
れ、すべては物語じゃない





from TANIKAWA to TERAYAMA  
VOL.9

命って  
「意味」以上のものじゃないかな  
どうしても「意味」だけじゃ  
捉えられないようなところがある  
ような気がする

山田 洋次

「意味」と「無意味」の間に  
なにがあるか、知ってるかい

「意味ありげ」ってもんがあるんだってさ  
あんまり「英」にこだわらずさってと

「意味」も「無意味」も  
捉えこねて

「意味ありげ」っていうところに  
いつてしまえば、さうな気がする

カメラ持つ手がいっぱいぶれてますねえ  
細くフレてるってことが  
ビントもよく合わせられないってことが  
生きている証しかな

もうすぐ我家の犬たちを紹介します  
初めに出てくるのが、  
プロフェッサー・ヘイスティングス  
娘です

次に出てくるのが、ワン  
母親です

彼らは  
「意味」は問わない  
「無意味」も問わない

九月二十六日 日曜日 午前九時

九月二十六日 日曜日 午前九時



from TERAYAMA to TANIKAWA  
VOL.10

昭和五十七年十一月  
母

昭和五十七年十一月  
母

谷川さん 手紙ありがとう  
しかし

「意味」と「無意味」とが  
さっぱり区別できない時代に生きているから、さ  
ばくたらは「英」にこだわっているのでは  
ないだろうか

ばくには、どうも 生きるってことは  
「意味」でも「無意味」でもなく

「意味ありげ」なことなんだ、っていう  
気がするんで

「意味ありげ」なこと  
体は少しずつ、この「意味ありげ」なことに  
遅れていく

九月二十六日 日曜日 午前九時

九月二十六日 日曜日 午前九時