

# gives the chickens a chance

possible, with contemporary issues now as concealed as the innards of electronic machines. To represent such an age, he took night shots of mundane traffic signals that all, bar hot-rodgers, instinctively obey.

"One is unaware," Hata said, "of how much one's physical movement is controlled by them and yet how inaccurate they can be . . . we let such signals totally control our actions and my fear is that when the time comes to exercise our individual judgment and choose our own path, we will be incapable of it."

For "Biomachine Hanako," Hata decided to raise the chicks himself rather than document the short and miserable lives of those at poultry farms to avoid any confusion as to what constituted his main theme — the unseen world of biotechnology. "It was difficult to shed the image of the managed society in the photos I took at the broiler farm and that was neither my theme nor my intention." He did, however, borrow some inmates from shots that required stark physical evidence of their physical state — necks and breasts rubbed raw and featherless on the wire of their cramped cages.

With Hanako and Taro installed, Hata photographed them and their layer and broiler successors over the next four years. He shot them in full color and lit as for a conventional studio portrait of a human subject. The resulting images describe their poignant and disgusting fate far more powerfully because of this loving treatment, than if he had chosen the familiar odd-angle, grainy, black-and-white documentary style.

Both Hanako and Taro were debarked at three months as is customary, with Hanako going on to lay 270 eggs a year, short of the industry target of 300 and the laboratory one of 360. A free-range chicken will lay 180 a year and live for seven to eight years. Those at the poultry farm are killed after one year and eight months once their egg-laying capacity drops and the shock therapy of two

weeks of water diet has failed to produce results, Hata explained. The carcasses are used to provide the stock for instant noodles.

A broiler's life is even shorter, he said — three months on average — since by that time their bodies are too heavy for their legs to support. Taro, Hata's broiler, who was fed standard compound feed, lasted a year and then died suddenly, a victim of cholesterol and an over-rich diet.

Needless to say, with such subjects, Hata has trouble in showing his work in mainstream venues. In the profession he is seen as an outsider. He studied law and interna-

tional politics at Doshisha University and received his technical training during a two-year stint at a commercial photography studio.

"If you do that for too long, you lose your power of independent thought," he said. Unusually too, for a Japanese photographer, he organizes shows of others whose work he admires like Edward Steichen, Eiko Yamazawa, Shomei Tomatsu and Emmett Gowin. "In Japan, photography is a 'craft trade' like judo, ikebana . . . influenced in its own way by the *iemoto* system; an enclosed world which excludes activity in the world of politics or social and environmental problems." He

sees these as essential "nutrition" for his own work.

In 1985, with the help of W. Eugene Smith's widow, Eileen, he selected 140 of Smith's Minamata works for the permanent collection of the Museum of Liberty where he teaches. Located at Ashiharabashi in Osaka and dedicated to the themes of discrimination and human rights, it was the first public museum in Japan to acquire and display a photographic archive. For the past five years it has run photographic workshops where the public can develop their conceptual and technical abilities and learn how to present them professionally.

Hata feels this is crucial. Although Japan produces the majority of the 1 billion cameras he estimates are owned in the first world, it is home to only 50 photography schools where the instruction is largely technical and the medium viewed as low-tech.

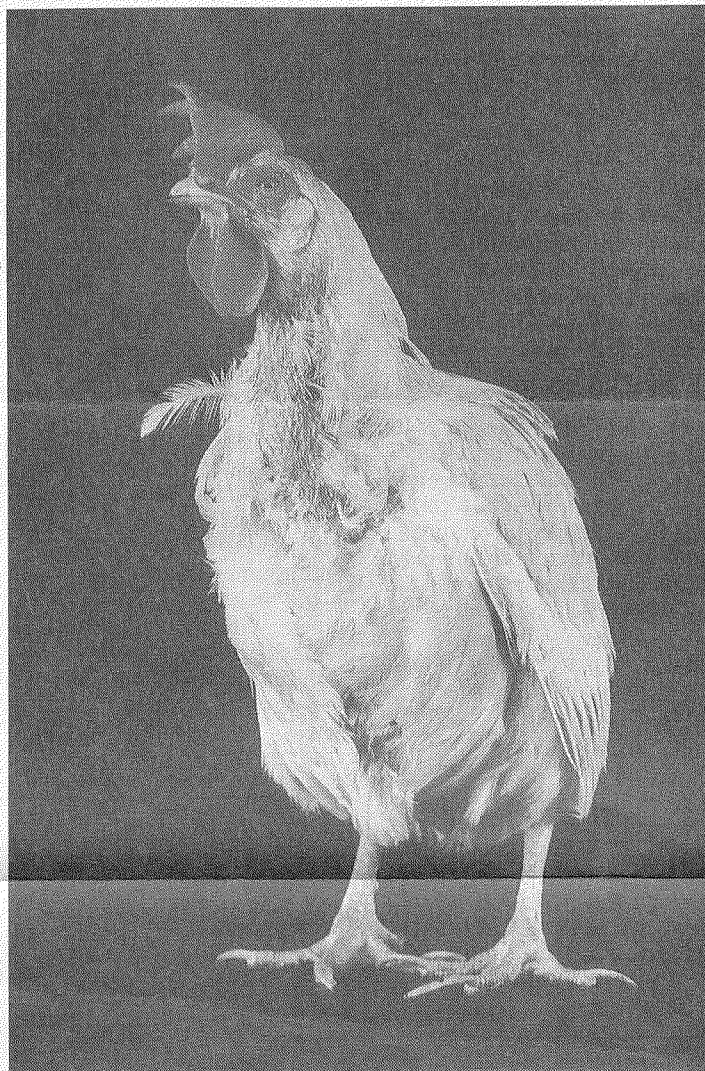
In contrast, the West Coast of the United States alone has 300 places to study. Hata teaches "Photographic Sociology" at Seian University of Art and Design in Kyoto, a course which covers video, computer techniques and desktop publishing, an approach he hopes will be the wave of the future. His activities do not stop there.

In 1982 he campaigned nationally to have public libraries buy photographic books, and in 1985 he founded the Osaka International Photo Center affiliated with the New York-based IPC run by Robert Capa's brother, Cornell.

Last October, he and a friend, Shigeo Nakagawa, pooled their joint collection of 4,000 books on photography and opened the Visual Arts Library in Tenjinbashi, Osaka. Hata is currently documenting the activities of the design office of Renzo Piano, the architect of Kansai's new international airport, but where he gets the time is anyone's guess.

"Biomachine Hanako" is available in hardback from Brain Center at (06) 365-6303.

The Visual Arts Library is open on Saturdays 12:30-6:30 p.m. Tel. (06) 352-0506.



**HANAKO, A VICTIM** of the cramped conditions of chicken farms, as captured by the camera of Yoshio Hata. Hata's photos, like the above titled "Grumble," rail against the present age of biotechnology in which animals have become "manufactured products." YOSHIO HATA PHOTO