When they still went along further and further, there was a very big river between the provinces of Musashi and Shimosa. That river is called Sumidagawa. When they stood in a group on the bank of that river and reflected upon their long journey, they were all worrying, thinking: “How endless far we have come!” But then the ferryman called: “Come quickly on board, it is already getting dark!” When they had gone aboard and were about to cross the river, all were very sad, for each of them had someone they loved in the capital. At that very moment a white bird with red beak and legs and of a size of a snipe was eating fish while sporting on the water. As it was a bird which is not seen in the capital, none of them knew it. When they asked the ferryman, he said: “This is the capital-bird!” Upon hearing this one of them recited:

- If you are true to your name
- Well, let me ask you something,
- Captal-bird: -
- Is the one I love
- Alive or dead?
- so that all in the boat burst into tears.
This house of mine
Is in a grove of pine
Along a blue sea,
And from its simple eaves
One sees high Fuji.

OTA Dokan 1432-1486 {source unknown} 1464 p.
once a favourite pleasure resort of the people of Yedo

Other sites in the immediate vicinity had been given to the French, Dutch and Americans for the same purpose. All these were carved out of what had been once a favourite pleasure resort of the people of Yedo, whither in spring all the classes flocked to picnic under the blossoms of the cherry-trees in sight of the blue waters of the bay. Gotenyama was indeed a famous spot in the history of the Shogunate. In its early days the head of the State was wont to go forth thither to meet the great daimios on their annual entry into Yedo, until Iyemitsu, the third of the line, to mark more strongly the supremacy to which he felt he could safely lay claim, resolved that henceforward he would receive them in his castle, just like the rest of his vassals. From that time the gardens had been dedicated to the public use.
one could see, through the branches of the Chinese black pine

Two or three houses away, an inn where geishas entertained had opened recently and it was sometimes noisy in the evening. But the houses on either side of her father’s place had their lattice doors still shut, and in the early morning the surroundings seemed unusually quiet. From the bay window of her father’s house one could see, through the branches of the Chinese black pine, the willow limbs swaying slightly in the fresh breeze, and beyond, the lotus leaves that covered the surface of the pond. Here and there among their green shone the pink dots of blossoms newly opened in the morning sun. The house, which faced north, would perhaps be rather cold in winter, but in summer it was ideal.
“What are you looking at?” I asked. Ishihara silently pointed toward the pond. Okada and I peered through the gray-tinged evening air in the direction he indicated. At the time of the story the whole surface of the pond from the little ditch that runs down from Nezu to the shore where the three of us were standing was overgrown with reeds. The dead leaves of the reeds gradually thinned out toward the center of the pond, where ragged dried-up lotus leaves and sponge-shaped seed pods dotted the surface, their stems, broken at varying heights, slanting down into the water at sharp angles and giving the scene a desolate air. Ten or twelve wild geese moved to and fro among the soot-colored stems of the lotuses, gliding over the black, faintly glimmering surface of the pond. A few of them sat motionless where they were. “Do you think you could throw a stone that far?” asked Ishihara, looking at Okada.
Tokyo! How the two characters of the city’s name set my heart throbbing! Tokyo nowadays is a battlefield of more than a million souls, jostling each other, trampling each other down, straining to raise themselves above their fellows; for the ten in every hundred who grow fat on blood and sweat of their ninety fellow-citizens, a mirage inspiring fugitive dreams of glory - ask yourself what our capital is today, and you find yourself cursing the place. But in those days Tokyo was our Promised Land.
their branches interlaced, their needles thick and luxuriant

Fall in Ueno Park. Ancient pine trees stood row upon row, their branches interlaced, their needles thick and luxuriant, of a green so deep as to saturate the heart of an onlooker. The fruit trees were desolate in contrast; old and young alike covered with withered leaves. The lonely camellia bushes, their branches laden with flowers, seemed to yearn for companionship. Several of the delicate maple trees had turned a blazing red. The cries of the few remaining birds mirrored the sadness of the season. All at once, the wind blew sharply. The branches of the cherry trees shivered and trembled, shaking free their dead leaves. Fallen leaves strewn on the ground rose as if moved by a spirit and danced about in happy pursuit of one another. Then as if by unanimous accord they lay down again.
“Simpleton!” Yoko murmured to herself. Putting him out of her mind as easily as one tosses rubbish on a fire, she rested her elbows on the rail and let her mind go blank, to feel on her cheeks the crisp air in which the late summer landscape was bathed. Green, indigo, yellow -her eyes registred the colours of the scene around her, but no clear outline of its forms; she was pleasantly conscious, though, of the cool breeze, gently lifting her sidelocks as it passed. The speed of the train was dizzying. Restlessly, Yoko’s mind travelled around the dark, nebulous mass at its centre. A good while later, as it seemed to her, with a sudden head-splitting clatter the train ran on to the iron suspension bridge over the Rokugo River, startling Yoko out of her dream. At the sight of the great cables spreading down like monstrous spider’s legs on either side, she stepped back instinctively under the awning, hiding her head with her sleeves as if praying.
...loneliness began to spread across its surface...

He stared at the surface of the pond. The reflection of many trees seemed to reach the bottom, and down deeper than the trees, the blue sky. No longer was he thinking of streetcars, or Tokyo, or Japan; a sense of something far-off and remote had come to take their place. The feeling had lasted but a moment, when loneliness began to spread across its surface like a veil of clouds.
The O'Tori-sama Festival was held three times in November this year, and except for the middle one, the weather was very fine. Therefore, the din of the crowds around the O'Tori Shrine on the first and the last fete rose to the highest pitch of the season. Availing themselves of this occasion, swarms of young people crept into the licensed quarters through the gate of the examination office. The noise they made with their laughter was so great that the people might be unable to identify its direction without difficulty.

Thick groups were seen straining their way through the crowd by accompanying their footsteps with threatening shouts. These spirited groups appeared one after another from all directions, say Sumicho, Kyomachi and the draw-bridges here and there. It was a peculiar congruity that all noises from the rippling hubbub at small riverside stores to the convivial uproar at the skyscraping edifice of O'Magaki seemed to unite to sound like a grand orchestra. This writer would remind a few happy readers of this spectacular enchantment of the festivals in those days.
I took a stroll along the Ginza, some time after the Great Earthquake. Hastily-built stores stood side by side, ready for the year-end bargain sale. Many stalls lined both sides of the street, just as they had prior to the earthquake. The stalls on the west side, sheltered with red screens, were selling bonsai pots for the New Year.

Window shopping gave me the same impression it had before the earthquake, and so did the people coming and going along the street. To put it bluntly, the “substance” of the famous Ginza was nothing more than the people there and the commodities on display. In other words, the Ginza itself, before the earthquake, was just a street of wretched stores.
The prefectures in the vicinity of the metropolis called Tokyo are being sucked dry of their economic resources and human talents by the city... Ah, Tokyo, you are a murderous machine that sucks out the blood of the peasants in the name of capitalistic, urban civilization.
The gay quarters exposes its pale belly

A somber, doleful compound
Girt by a high wooden fence.
A black gutter runs still by those open spaces.
Trees grow and the place reeks
With the stench of pallid carbolic acid.
Yoshiwara!
The gay quarters exposes its pale belly,
a dead frog by the dike.
A stagnant wind, reeking of sewage, raked the surface of Shinobazu Pond...

What was to become of me? just to think about that was enough to leave me shuddering and too distraught to sit still, so I left my Hongo apartment dragging a walking stick and headed for Ueno Park. It was an evening in mid-September. My white yukata was already out of season, and I felt horribly conspicuous, as I glowed in the dark, and so full of sorrow I no longer wanted to live. A stagnant wind, reeking of sewage, raked the surface of Shinobazu Pond. The lotuses growing there had begun to decay, their grisly carcasses entrapped between bent, elongated stalks, and the idiot faces of people streaming by in the evening cool wer etched with such total exhaustion that one might have thought the end of the world was at hand.
these are the Gates of Hell

I walked all the way to Ueno Station. Through the portals of this “Wonder of the Orient” swarmed a dark, writhing, numberless throng. Vanquished souls, one and all. I couldn’t help seeing them that way. For the farming villages in the North east, these are the Gates of Hell. You pass through them to enter the big city, and again to return home, broken and defeated, with nothing but the rags that cling to your ravaged body.
Released for the noon break after three hours of work, the office employees of the Marunouchi area flocked onto the spacious lawns in front of the Imperial Palace for a few minutes of relaxation. One group, stretched out on the grass, which had just begun to turn green, were flickering through magazines. Some of the girls were playing volleyball, their cheerful voices accompanying the ball at each throw, while others watched them. At the edge of the moat, beneath the budding willow trees, a young man and his girl were looking down at the water and watching the swans skim gracefully over its surface.
After parting from her brother, Tomoe crossed the Hibiya road junction and headed in the direction of the Nikkatsu Building. Though it had been raining that morning, the skies were now perfectly clear and the wet pavements reflected the brilliant rays of the sun. The windows of the buildings too were sparkling. Foreigners and Japanese with briefcases poured out of the doors, intent on their business. A taxi pulled up and discharged its passenger, only to pick up another. Another busy day had begun.
To cross the city (or to penetrate its depth, for underground there are whole networks of bars, shops to which you sometimes gain access by a simple entryway, so that, once through this narrow door, you discover, dense and sumptuous, the black India of commerce and pleasure) is to travel from the top of Japan to the bottom, to superimpose on its topography the writing of its faces.

Here is a town for box men. Anonymity is the obligation of the inhabitants and the right to live there is accorded only to persons who are no one. All those who are registred are sentenced by the very fact of being registred.
Other lie down on the street,

I proceeded east through the dilapidated arcade, known as the Iroha, which bustled with evening shoppers. San’ya is home to entrepeneurs, office workers, shopkeepers, and housewives as well as to day laborers, and the teeming arcade serves the entire community. The farther east you walk, however, the drearier the surroundings become. Disheveled men sit in lazy circles drinking and chatting. Other lie down on the street, sleeping off their liquor. More line up in front of two or three tiny take-out-stalls, waiting to buy dinner. Still others imbibe at a stand-up bar opening onto the street.
Multistoreyed flats were going up around the wood

I began to take the children there occasionally. Several times, too, we released pet turtles or goldfish into the pond. Many nearby families who’d run out of room for aquarium creatures in their overcrowed flats would slip them into the pond to spend the rest of their lives at liberty.

Rocks rose from the water here and there, and each was studded with turtles sunning themselves. They couldn’t have bred naturally in such numbers. They must have been the tiny turtles sold at fairground stalls and pet shops, grown up without a care in the world. More of them lined the water’s edge at one’s feet. No doubt there were other animals on the increase—goldfish, loaches, and the like. Multistoreyed flats were going up around the wood in quick succession, and more living things were brought down from their rooms each year. Cats were one animal I’d overlooked though. If tipping out turtles was common practice, there was no reason why cats shouldn’t be dumped here and dogs too.
The plaza in front of Shibuya Station is a lake at the bottom of a valley where several rivers meet. When the sluice gates fly open, hordes of people flood into the intersection from all directions and whirlpools start to swirl. So on rainy days like today it’s a sea of different-colored umbrellas bouncing and knocking around for space. Made me imagine some bizarre machine with a lot of gears going round and round for no good reason.
This city is a piece of machinery unrivaled in history for size, complexity, precision; unrivaled for productivity, too, if we measure that in man-miles, sheets of paper, computer printouts, and radio and TV waves. It’s of a scale that beggars analogy: far more stupendous than any beehive or termite’s colony, any factory.

The ideas and tools which produced the first archaic prototype of this machine came from the other end of the world, from a culture as unlike Japan’s as any the world has seen. Yet somehow the Japanese have made it their own. Charmed throughout their history by the punctiliously correct performance of ritual, they have made of the whole city and its operation a fantastic diurnal ceremony.
watch the young members of the 'bamboo-shoot' generation.

On Sundays, one corner of Yoyogi Park and the road that runs alongside it are packed with onlookers who have come to watch the young members of the 'bamboo-shoot' generation. The spectators watch enthusiastically as the young men and women form circles here and there and begin a peculiar dance to music from cassette-players. I'm one of the observers. The bamboo-shoot teenagers sport long, Korean-style robes of white or pink, and both male and female participants wear rouge on their cheeks. The groups vary one circle to the next, and each circle has its own leader who sets the pace for the dancing. Off to the side, a foreigner was zealously cranking away at his 8-milimetre camera. As I watch the dances, sadly enough I remember the years during the war. When I was the same age as these young men and women, Japan was already involved in a massive war.
short embrace of towering light

a girdle drive
a river dive
a twinkling serpentine
a city dance
up ... down
and ... up again
then ... slide
and ride
a folding road
into a wall
down, fall
rise up
wigwagging ways
in short embrace
of towering light

Tjebbe van Tijen (1944-) Circling the Express-way (2000)