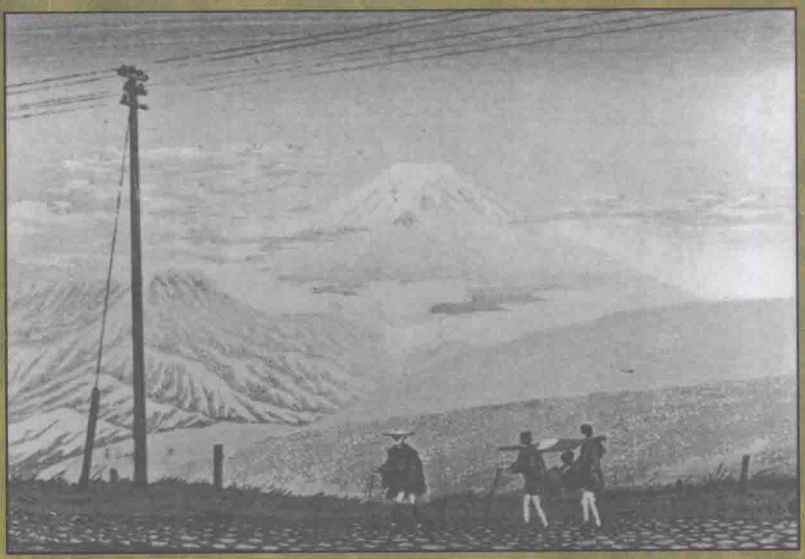
Karatani Kōjin



Origins of Modern Japanese Literature

FOREWORD BY FREDRIC JAMESON

TRANSLATION EDITED BY BRETT DE BARY

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Foreword: In the Mirror of Alternate Modernities

Fredric Jameson

I have high hopes that the publication of Karatani Kōjin's book—one of those infrequent moments in which a rare philosophical intelligence rises to the occasion of a full national and historical statement—will also have a fundamental impact on literary criticism in the West; and this in two ways, which are rather different from its effects in Japan itself. For *The Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* has some lessons for us about critical pluralism, in addition to its principal message, which turns on that old and new topic of modernity itself.

I take it that any reflection on modernity—it is a little like the question about the self, or better still, about the nature of language, when you are inside it and cannot be expected to imagine anything which is outside—has known three renewals, three moments of an intense and speculative questioning. The first is presumably the moment in which the thing appears, which we call Enlightenment or Western science or industrialization, and which we might also call the last illness of God or the onset of the secular market, or capitalism and commodification. But in this first moment, the definition of science is at one with its defense, and the antediluvian Enlightenment heroes, like Auden's Voltaire, remain alert to the grim possibility of mythic regression:

> And still all over Europe stood the horrible nurses
> Itching to boil their children.

The philosophers are thus still bathed in the triumphalism of a conquest of nature that also promised to be a conquest of the self and a reconstruction of the social order in the human image and on a human scale.

Few statues to those heroes remained when the second period of a renewed interrogation of the nature of modernity rolled around: the fin de siècle, the period of positivism, of Simmel and Durkheim, the end of the Gründerzeit and of the heroic age of the establishment of the bourgeois republics, and the beginning of a long doubtful future constellated by immense working-class suburbs as well as the points of light of hysteria and neurosis, from the

midst of which the more grimly stoic were able to "see how much they could bear" as Freud and Weber asked themselves unpleasant questions about the instinctual repressions and renunciations which "civilization" demanded in payment.

This second Enlightenment, or era of suspicion and demystification, was characterized by a wave of technological innovation which signed itself as irrevocable: its theorists had to confront a fundamental change in their experience, about which they had begun to be able to doubt that it was to be called progress, but were otherwise quite unable to imagine that it might ever again disappear. In fact, of course, it was still about the future that they were thinking, since outside the big cities (of the "Western" or "advanced" countries), the new science-and-technology was socially in the minority: aristocratic governments and countrysides, precapitalist colonies, still largely surrounded these "modern" industrial islands or enclaves (the spaces of Baudelaire and Zola).

In a third moment, however—our own—those vestiges of different noncapitalist pasts, if they have not everywhere disappeared, have at least receded to the point where they are objects of nostalgia. Today, therefore, a fully "modernized" life-world can be experienced as well as imagined as a realized fact: we call this fact postmodernity, at least in part because of the radically new technology that has accompanied the new global standardization, but mainly, I think, because what had previously been thought of as modernity, with its various modernisms, has now been revealed to us as a peculiarly old-fashioned and outmoded historical stage compared to our own (modernism thus paradoxically proving to be the result of incomplete modernization). Yet that older modernity could be the object of avant-garde excitement and affirmation (as the first forms of Western science were for the Enlightenment philosophes): the futurists dramatized that for us from within that industrial latecomer which at the same time inspired the thought of Gramsci; while a profound *Kulturpessimismus* offered another option, another affective or libidinal investment, with respect to the modern fact and the modern self. Postmodernity has relegated its enthusiasms and affirmations to science and technology (that is to say, to the consumption of the new gadgetry of a communications age), but is equally innocent of any Wagnerian or metaphysical global pessimism, despite the precise information it has about atomic energy, endemic famine, AIDS, and global warming. Instead, the theorization of the postmodern has seemed to billow and eddy around

a new project: namely, that "overcoming of the modern" which the Japanese were the first to conceive of and name in the 1930s (when, to be sure, for some of them it meant something as simple as "overcoming" the United States and the West).

In Japan these three stages, separated in the West by two hundred years, have been compressed into a century. This is why Karatani's vision of the modern leaps out at us with such blinding force. It is indeed well known in the sciences how the "outsider principle" explains the capacity of non-card-carrying unprofessional tourists and visitors-to-a-given-discipline to deduce impending fundamental paradigm shifts; so also in the arts, where modernism is scarcely dreamed of in the British industrial core, but makes its claims in more recently "developed" areas and even more intensely in "semi-peripheral" ones such as Nicaragua and Uruguay, St. Louis, Idaho, and Lisbon or Alexandria (where experience is focused and heightened by the burning glass of the metropolis).

Here, however, it is as though—even more paradoxically science-fictional than the "inversions" (*tentō*) with which Karatani will perform a whole series of theoretical prestidigitations—it is as though his book itself, written in the Japanese 1970s and 1980s had, lost and forgotten, somehow preceded all the other earlier theories of modernity that now look like so many commentaries on it. This is the first reason for its claims on us: it is not even an "alternate history" which is offered us by this "postmodern" analysis of the institutions of the modern self, writing, literature, and scientific objectivity that were constructed and imposed by the Meiji Revolution. Rather, it is as though that great laboratory experiment which was the modernization of Japan allows us to see the features of our own development in slow motion, in a new kind of form (which might be compared to an older traditional history or sociology as the cinema to the novel, for example, or animation to documentary).

Karatani's references are, to be sure, local and unfamiliar to many of us, although he makes it clear how immensely a figure like Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916) ought ideally (along with Rabindranath Tagore or Lu Xun) to loom on a truly global map of literary production. I find that, as with certain kinds of music criticism or theory, an account of the initial situation of production itself, with its raw materials and specific form problems, allows one to imagine the structure of the work more purely and abstractly than any distracted ad hoc audition might do; that is, certain kinds of analyses—

like those of Karatani here—are analogous to creative works themselves, insofar as they propose a schema which it is the reader's task to construct and to project out onto the night sky of the mind's eye; and this is in fact, I believe, the way in which a good deal of contemporary theory is read by artists, who do not in fact read such books primarily for their perceptive contributions to the analysis of this or that familiar work of art, the way an older criticism was appealed to by readers of belles lettres. These younger "postmodern" readers, as I understand it, look at the theoretical abstractions of post-contemporary books in order to imagine the concrete referents to which those abstractions might possibly apply—whether those are artistic languages or experiences of daily life. Here, the analysis produces the absent text of what remains to be invented, rather than modestly following along behind the achieved masterpiece with a running commentary. It is—to use the expression again—science-fictional (as befits a culture like ours, just catching up with science fiction, not merely in its content, but in its form): the new abstractions model the forms of a reality that does not yet exist, but which it would be interesting to experience.

But in Japanese literature and culture we have just such a reality; and whether or not Sōseki and the other names in Karatani's pages are as yet familiar to us even in the (translated) flesh-and-blood of their *écriture*, it can be a satisfying experience to imagine the literary situation and the multiple form-problems which Sōseki (as Karatani presents him) is the name for.

Now let us take a closer look at Karatani's modernity, that is to say, at ourselves and those otherwise invisible scars of our modernization that here briefly light up like an infrared flare: subject and object, to be sure; the old "centered self" and the old "real" world of scientific objectivity; but also—wonder of wonders!—the novel (is it so modern, let alone socially so important?) and also landscape, and even disease (the kind you write about in the newspapers), children, and "depth"—for are not children a kind of depth? but a depth rather different from Freud's unconscious or Marx's infrastructures, which Karatani will surprise us by locating at the very surface of our modernity.

None of these symptoms can be made visible to the naked eye without reckoning in the effects of Karatani's "inversion" (*tentō*), which as the Formalists, Brecht, Barthes, and so many others taught us, turns the historical into the natural, and generates an illusion

of temporal depth and continuity—a past! the illusion of a past!—where there was none before. Here the Nietzsche/Foucault lesson of the genealogy can be misleading indeed, often seeming to reestablish this very past which its vocation was to have demystified. Thus, to take Karatani's central example, the sudden emergence, full-blown and aureoled with its own spurious history, of the "novel" in its Western sense, at once sends scholars not merely searching for its "genealogy," the larval forms that later on in the evolutionary tree will become retroactively identified as the novel as such, but also—what is in a sense much more serious—for pre-novelistic forms, for narratives that are utterly non-novelistic and can thus stand as the sign of "genres" that existed before Meiji (or, in Western terms, before capitalism). But perhaps there never were genres in this sense? And perhaps adding the fatal prefix somehow always irredeemably deformed the form identified as somehow "preceding" what thereby becomes the fulcrum of the definition? It is thus to transgress the fundamental law, the basic distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic, which in this sense forbids the mixing of the two realities: "inversion" is a synchronic drama, of no little magnitude and interest (origin, emergence, reshuffling of the deck, reorganization of the world); it can be witnessed only on the condition that we do not try to introduce any diachronic reflections or reference into the matter (which need to be pursued in some other place: like a tribal taboo, in which one group of magicians works on the plants, while another, wholly segregated from those, deals with the uncleanliness of blood and living organism).

The "novel" turns out to stand for a great many novelties, some familiar, some less so. Landscape is the first of these which Karatani will seize on as a more suggestive way of conveying the strangeness and the freshness of an interest in "nature without people"; it has the advantage of enforcing the analytic inseparability of experience and art or form, since the landscape in question is not a thing but a paradigm, called "Western landscape"; and the very example makes it clear that the experience of the natural earth spread out contemplatively before the eyes is necessarily mediated by categories of representation developed inside the mind by artistic (or, if you prefer, formal or generic) production. The emergence of that same unpeopled landscape in the West has long been one of the most interesting stories Western historians of art have had to tell (see, for example, John Barrell's *The Dark Side of Landscape*) but here

the movement is speeded up, and much more visibly coordinated with forms of narrative than its Western opposite number. Meanwhile, "landscape" as an independent and autonomous reality—no longer a mere sign, as we shall see in a moment, but a wash of contingency—dialectically brings into being its unrelated correlative, namely the human face (it is an insight Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari will develop independently in their *Mille Plateaux*). Karatani explains: "I do not mean to say that landscapes and faces had not previously existed. But for them to be seen as 'simply landscape' or 'simply face' required, not a perceptual transformation, but an inversion of that topos which had privileged the *conception* landscape or face." The perceptual warning is a crucial one, for it is a strong diachronic temptation to rewrite all this in terms of the emergence of a new kind of body (I've done so myself). At Karatani's level of abstraction, however, this is unsatisfactory because it tends to attribute a kind of causality to the body as such and to the McLuhanite sensorium. The force of Karatani's analysis lies rather in the attribution of this new body and its perceptions and sensations to a more fundamental restructuration (or "inversion") which involves categories that take precedence over experience in this sense. To the degree to which Derrideanism has become a kind of method, a kind of named philosophy, it might also be preferable, despite Karatani's careful indications, to remove the new synchronic event from the whole code of writing and *écriture* as well (which then tends to reform into a kind of "cause" in its own right): even though the primary factor in the pages that deal with literature here is a kind of scriptive aesthetic, the *genbun itchi*, or a Japanese version of that drive to break up rhetoric and to bring writing closer to popular speech and the vernacular, which one can observe in all the European languages in this same period. But owing to the intermediation of Chinese characters, this effort in Japanese is a far more visibly ideological matter, which at once (but as already in Wordsworth) implies some greater authenticity and sincerity, indeed, some more fundamental embodiment of expression and expressiveness, than is visible in the various Western realisms and naturalisms.

It is an ideal which now for the first time projects something like literature into a Japanese social space in full reorganization: to the degree to which causality is a formal and a narrative structure (which is to say, the degree to which we cannot really think without it, although we can try to cancel it after the fact), we can also

tell the story that way, and suggest (as Karatani sometimes seems to do) that literature—the new institution of the literary as such—*causes* that reorganization called Meiji to fall into place around it. Or we can more modestly retain literature as a privileged object in which that reorganization can be analogically observed: the form of the narrative is at this point of self-consciousness not now very important (although we will return to its political consequences in a moment). There are, to be sure, other versions of the narrative as well: Masao Miyoshi's classic *Accomplices of Silence* marks the gap between the raw material of Japanese social experience and these abstract formal patterns of Western novel construction that cannot always be welded together seamlessly. (Meanwhile a similar account, which tests the imported technology—the Western form of the novel—against the content or social experience of the non-Western importing country, thereby also allowing us to measure the systematic modifications, or *Unfunktionierung* of the former in the context of the latter—can also be found in Menakshee Mukerjee's study of the origins of the Indian novel, *Realism and Reality*.) Nor will the Western reader forget the lessons of Raymond Williams, in *Keywords*, about the slow emergence of the word "literature," or of Foucault about the slow formation of that related thing he calls "humanism": slow is here the watchword for those related experiments, the measurement time is too long, the graphs in the laboratory oscillate idly over too many empty periods. The new experiment and the new laboratory equipment allow us to reproduce the same thing in a more compact set of equations, and as a more vivid event.

But there is a more basic reversal of causality at work in Karatani's *Darstellung* which is crucial insofar as it tries to strike at the most fundamental of our social and psychic illusions (at precisely those objective illusions for which literature in this sense is responsible): this is the notion of interiority, the centered subject, the psychological, indeed the Self in its intolerably Western sense (Karatani has observed elsewhere that the Japanese never needed deconstruction because they never had a centered subject to begin with: here, at least, he documents a tendency and a kind of formation). What we call interiority, however, and think of in terms of psychological experience (and by way of a great deal of imagery) is, however "simply," the effect of the literary institution as such, which by inventing a new kind of "unspeakable sentence" (Ann Banfield's name for the related phenomenon of *style indirect libre*)

slowly causes a new "experience" to come into being as what that kind of sentence "expresses" (or would express if it were possible to speak it in the first place). The pages on narrative in Japanese, and in particular about the drama of Sōseki as he glimpses the radical difference of the Western novel and then produces a host of very different and unique generic experiments as a way of approximating that condition and avoiding it all at once—these pages have very little equivalent in Western criticism; only the remarkable density of Barthes's pages in *Writing Degree Zero* are comparable (and indeed, were those epigrammatic pronouncements of Barthes developed in the direction of the social and the psychoanalytic, the result would be a statement of the dimensions of Karatani's for Japan).

Now, however, we can also move in two directions: if it is not romanticized as a pre-anything, or as a form of more authentically primitive and primal writing-cum-experience, a certain approximation to what literature destroys can be attempted—it is simply the *figure*, as Chinese characters (but also the related forms of Chinese and Japanese landscape, and also the fixed forms of narrative and poetry and the like) can dramatize:

> My own concern . . . has been to consider the kind of inversion of semiotic constellation which makes transcription possible. In order for us to assume it to be natural that things exist and the artist merely observes them and copies them, "things" must first be discovered. But this requires the repression of the signification, or figurative language (Chinese characters), that precedes "things," as well as the existence of a language which is supposedly transparent. It is at this point that "interiority" is constituted.

Once such interiority is constituted, however, we can begin to work in the other direction and trace out some of the more surprising consequences: that of "disease," for instance, and of the medical in general. Karatani's striking chapter on literary tuberculosis is in fact preceded by a very interesting series of reflections on the role of Christianity in Japan as the "ideology," so to speak, of a "repression of the diversity of polytheism," and thereby the production (or "discovery") of the "natural body"—a discovery which is at one with Western sexuality and Western sexual guilt. Meanwhile, medicine builds on the production of that new body to achieve a host of new kinds of effects: it was indeed, in most non-Western countries, the first and primary form of Western science, an "agent of modernization" whose symbolic value cannot be underestimated. Any

reader of Lu Xun, for example, will remember the simultaneously personal and national meaning of his decision to study medicine (in Japan), as well as the even more pointed meaning of his resolution to convert a practice of physical medicine into that of cultural production (see the preface to *Na Han* [*A Call to Arms*]). Medicine is thus all of Western science, as well as being *a* science: it is "thoroughly political, constituting one form of centralized power," and it also produces, in this case, not only the medical body but "disease" itself in its various theories. Karatani proposes something like a medical version of the James-Lange theory of the emotions in which what we sometimes think of as disease is the production of disease theory (in this case, the theory of "germs"), such that the appropriation of diseases for social and ideological purposes (as in Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*) cannot properly be the object of an ideological critique, which would imply that there existed an objective, nonideological reality of "disease" as such out there which the appropriation denatured and deformed. But for Karatani disease is always already "infected" with the literary: the illusion of an objective physical reality to which "science" and "medicine" were supposed to turn their nonideological attention is itself part of that ideology. The production of "childhood" and also of the "primitive" (or the object of anthropology and the ethnological gaze—here the inhabitants of the internally colonized Japanese "west" or the frontier of Hokkaido Island) is then an extension of this interiorizing process in a different direction. We reach the analytic climax of this line of inquiry with Karatani's discussion of "depth" as the abstract pattern and paradigm of all these ideological productions or acts of constitution. The Western reader, already bombarded with any number of post-Marxisms and revisions of Freud, will find much to ponder in Karatani's reversals of the stereotypes of those figures:

> While the theories of Marx or Freud . . . are often described as discoveries of a kind of substratum or base, what they actually accomplished was a dismantling of precisely that teleological and transcendental perspectival configuration that produces the concepts of substratum and stratification: it was the surface level, rather, that commanded their attention.

The literary debate over plot versus surface provides the vehicle for this discussion, anchoring it back into the literary institution with which the book begins and recirculating its fundamental insights through the codes and thematics of nationalism and of aesthetic con-

struction, bringing these issues down to the present of Karatani's writing (which corresponds to the postmodern self-consciousness of the rich and prosperous corporate Japan after the end of the postwar, and leaves open the fate of these structures and the questions about them in a future in which, among other things, Karatani's own book exists). I am reminded a little of Henri Lefebvre's call for a new spatial dialectic, a reconstruction of the dialectic in different terms from Hegel's old temporal ones, terms more consistent with the synchronic nature of contemporary thought. Karatani's discussions also reflect these contemporary constraints (as must everyone's), and it is not always clear whether the choice of even that minimal figure of depth versus surface does not, in its last shred of content, plunge you back into the very episteme you sought to analyze (and above which you imagined yourself somehow at least momentarily to float). But by the time this is over a reversal has taken place in which the reader—having begun by observing Japan—now finds Japanese theory observing him, and waiting for his own drawing of the consequences: as those emerge from the vague questions as to how you would do something like this in a Western context and what "application" this kind of thinking and reading might have for our own (even more "modern," modernized, and modernist) texts. This is an excellent and healthy geopolitical reversal, in my view; but any discussion of it needs to be preceded with a remark about Karatani's own political agenda.

For now we need to complicate our discussion of the dilemmas of historical representation (*Darstellung*) in an analysis like this (causality as a form, etc.), and in particular revise our suggestion that the novel or literature was at one with Meiji, and that its choice as an allegorical resonator or condenser for the historical narrative was relatively optional. For Karatani also simultaneously projects a historical narrative which stands outside this one, and which has determinate political consequences: this is the notion that what we are here calling "Meiji"—that is to say, modernization and modernity, literature, interiority, "Westernization"—is itself the result of defeat and failure. There were in this view *two* Meiji revolutions, one that succeeded and one that failed. The successful one is the constitution of the Japanese modern state as we know it; the failed revolution was contemporaneous with the Paris Commune, the popular uprisings that arose in millenarian fashion at the "dawn smell" of a new era and at the collapse of the old structures (like Bakhtin's moment of Rabelais, at the end of the Middle Ages; or

Imamura's apocalyptic and utopian film, *Eijanaika* [1981], about this same period). These needed to be repressed in order for power to be consolidated by the clique around the new emperor, but it is their repression and defeat which is accompanied by a massive popular disillusionment that can alone enable the setting in place of the new authoritarian structures: "[T]o speak in Freudian terms, the libido which was once directed towards the People's Rights movement and the political novel lost its object and was redirected inward, at which point 'landscape' and 'the inner life' appeared."

We here fleetingly glimpse an alternate world alongside our own historical one: a world in which modernity in the current coinage did not occur, without our being able to discern clearly the outlines of what, equally supplanting precapitalist forms and relations, took its place. But this alternate world, outside our own history, also lies beyond the boundaries of our explanatory and narrative systems. It is at the least, however, a rather different vision from that of Lévi-Strauss, for whom the "West" (Greek philosophy, abstract reason, science) need never have happened. Lévi-Strauss's attractive nostalgia, rooted in the experience of and commitment to "cold" or tribal societies, evokes an aleatory moment, an effect of chance, of the recombination of historical molecules, which fatally leads, or not, to the infernal machine we know as modernity or capitalism; it is a peculiarly fatalist view of the inevitability of historical development as a roll of the dice or a chance lightning strike, and then the rigid stasis of the irremediable! (This is not to suggest that history might not really be like this. . . .)

In Karatani, however, a notion of popular struggle survives which is not nostalgic, since it eventuated in failure and does not seem to imply any particular optimism about current Japanese conditions, from which all radical initiative seems to have evaporated in the years since the onset of their *Wirtschaftswunder* (the economic miracle of the early 1970s). We must remember, also, that we are ourselves trying to think this notion of a collective creativity that preempts institutions during a period of national stasis and disillusionment in the United States today which is doubled by a virtually global one: our difficulty in imagining any other narrative paradigm than a deterministic one—the slow, fateful, irresistible Foucauldian encroachments of systems and institutions—may thus be a historical symptom as much as an epistemological problem.

But I want to add something about the relationship of thought and disillusionment, which seems consistent with this glacial back-

ward look at an unfinished project that was also a missed opportunity. We are, indeed, more than familiar with the conception of an expressive relationship between a thought system and the social fate of its class fraction: Lucien Goldmann's picture, in *The Hidden God*, of the way in which Jansenism's Augustinian pessimism articulated the failure of the *noblesse de robe*, from which it issued, to become something like a mandarin ruling class, is suggestive for a range of other moments as well. But we need to kick this static notion of relationship into historical motion, if only in the past tense, and to restore to this litany of class failures the freshness of opportunities, even and particularly of the missed ones. It is a way of thinking that might even let us look differently at our own time, which so many people seem intent on reading as the triumph of the market, if not indeed of the nationalisms and religious fundamentalisms, over socialism. What if it were the other way around, however? What if it were the failures of socialism, better still, of socialists and communists, which left in their wake a universal disillusionment in which only consumption and narrow fanaticism seem possible, at least for the present?

The national question, then, brings me to my conclusion, which also has something to do with the lessons of Karatani's book for North American theory and criticism in the present conjuncture. I suggested that a formal and suggestive way of reading about unfamiliar literary works was possible, and sometimes, although surely not always and not even often, recommended. Now we need to see that something analogous can be said about unfamiliar criticism and theory, on the occasion of a book in which no little attention is paid to classic Japanese debates most of us have never suspected the existence of. There are also ways of reading the form, as well as the content, of theoretical debates and critical moves and countermoves: indeed, for anyone interested in the procedures called *mapping*, current scientific fashions show computers at use, not in solving substantive problems, but, by way of so-called "phase space," in matching up the abstract shapes and rhythms of a variety of different scientific hypotheses and results, as well as in measuring the abstract rhythms into which certain complex forms of movement seem to break down. We don't need to extrapolate the metaphysical slogans (the way humanists once did with Einsteinian relativities): it is the nature of this mapping procedure which is suggestive, and not for predictive purposes either, or with a view toward identifying recurrent paradigms. Rather, Karatani sets us

the example of a criticism of criticism, a theorization about theory, which respects the passionate content of these interventions, while measuring, as it were, their velocity and reactive patterns, and in particular the fidelity with which so many ideologically different positions offer precise symptoms of the detectable absence of that unrepresentable cause he calls inversion.

This presupposes a double movement, a double reading, in which the critical text is apprehended simultaneously for what it is and for what it stands for, as statement and as symptom, or if you prefer my old-fashioned language, as content and as form. But it is only at this price that criticism and theory can today recover an urgency they seemed to have had even a few years ago. Then, it was a question of a struggle for a certain theoretical pluralism: a parliamentary struggle, so to speak, in which repressed and silenced or ignored critical tendencies spoke out for representation and swaggered in the broad daylight of a tumultuous popular forum. But it happened to critical theory as to the parliamentary struggle itself: the achievement of pluralism and of representation (however marginal) then gave way to the Hemingwayesque moment (it isn't fun anymore), any number of practitioners finding that once you were allowed a hearing for your product, it automatically became less interesting. This is of course what happened universally in Europe when social democracy (generally in alliance with the tiny remains of an old communist party) came to power and offered to run capitalism (as Stanley Aronowitz has put it) impartially in the interests of all of its factions. Nor was the experience unique to Europe: my Taiwanese friends paint a similar picture of the depoliticization that followed the legalization of the opposition parties (after a vibrant period of militancy and hope). This letdown (which does not even, in good Aristotelian fashion, *follow* on achieved coitus) is what was predicted under the name "the end of ideology" and characterized, when it finally arrived, as "the end of history." But it is not very interesting to attribute it, as Daniel Bell does, to that tired old bourgeois narrative paradigm, the disappearance of belief, the waning of "values," the end of commitment (otherwise known as "the death of God").

I would have us look in another direction, one we have necessarily already acknowledged when as North Americans we open *The Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, this remarkable achievement of contemporary Japanese theory. The center has a special kind of blindness, which the margins, for all their discomforts, do

not have to cope with. I've described elsewhere the astonishment an intellectual from the superstate can feel, not about the nationalism of other countries and culture areas—that would be a superficial and self-serving view of it, given the nasty things people say about nationalism—but rather about their preoccupation with the national character and the national situation, the permanent and allegorical vocation of their intellectuals to denounce the national misery. This is very much a matter of structural possibilities: dependency arouses consciousness, however unwanted; but those who are not dependent—let's not call it independence or freedom, exactly—can scarcely have that same awareness, and can scarcely want to. One is dependent on one's own dependents in some other sense, to be sure: but masters have never paid the same kind of attention to slaves or servants as the latter have paid to their overseers (developing in the process those characterological traits of subalternity with which more recent Gramscian and Fanonian analysts have enriched the basic Hegelian paradigm). The American Jeremiad was a brief flash of cultural inferiority during the shaking off of English cultural tutelage; and the essential insecurity of a cultureless business-oriented superstate today is an unconscious one, whose repressed return only in the symptoms of jingoism, masculinist fantasy, and the imported fashions of the ancien régime (as in the Anglophilia of PBS or the Francophilia of high theory).

But if we are the first truly secular state, the first truly godless one, without any of the remnants of older class systems and cultural inheritances that weigh down other places with a certain dead splendor, then we need to embrace our insecurity as a special historical privilege, as a unique national gift. We need to cultivate a new kind of "national" inferiority complex of the superstate. We need to train ourselves to be vulnerable in some new and original sense, to be passive-receptive, weak, un-American, susceptible to boundless influence by currents from foreign countries and distant cultures (as indeed our mass culture already is with respect to its internal minorities). A long process of collective psychoanalysis, collective self-analysis, might well begin with this letting down of the barriers and with a decisive reveling in a new kind of geopolitical subalterity. If this becomes the task of American intellectuals, I think we can expect them to recover something of that same sense of mission and commitment which we find in these pages, in which Karatani so memorably sets out to remake the traditional historical and cultural image of Japan's modernization in the Meiji Era.