



History and Repetition (Weatherhead Books on Asia)

Kojin Karatani

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Kojin Karatani, one of Japan's most influential thinkers, wrote the essays collected in *History and Repetition* during a period of radical historical change, triggered by the collapse of the Cold War order and the death of the Shōwa emperor in 1989. Through an original reading of Marx, Karatani developed a theory of history based on the repetitive cycle of crises attending the expansion and transformation of capital. His work led to a rigorous theoretical analysis of political, economic, and literary forms of representation—joined by a detailed, empirical study of Japan's modern history—that recast historical events as a series of repeated forms forged at moments of transition in the stages of global capitalism.

History and Repetition helped cement Karatani's status as one of Japan's premier intellectuals, producing original work that traverses philosophy, political economy, history, and literature. The first complete translation into English, carried out with the cooperation of Karatani himself, this book begins with an innovative reading of Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, tracing the thinker's early formulation of a theory of the state. Following with a study of violent crises as they recur after major transitions of power, Karatani develops his theory of historical repetition, launching a groundbreaking interpretation of fascism (in both Europe and Japan) as the spectral return of the absolutist monarch amid the crisis of representative democracy. For Karatani, fascism represents the most violent materialization of the repetitive mechanism of history. At the same time, he also seeks out singularities operating outside historical repetition's brutal inevitability, whether they find representation in literature or, more precisely, in the process of literature's demise. Closely reading the work of Oe Kenzaburo, Mishima Yukio, Nakagami Kenji, and Murakami Haruki, Karatani compares what is recurrent and universal with what is singular and unrepeatable, while developing a compelling analysis of modern literature's decline (countering his influential account of modern literature's emergence in *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*). Merging theoretical arguments with a concrete analysis of cultural and intellectual history, these essays provide a brilliant introduction to Karatani's thought and a multidisciplinary perspective on world history.

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