As Karatani Kōjin writes in his *Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen* (1980, tr. *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, 1993), by the beginning of the 20th century in Japan, “the illusion that there is something like a ‘true self’ has taken root. It is an illusion that is established when writing has come to be seen as derivative and that voice which is most immediate to the self, and which constitutes self-consciousness, is privileged. The psychological person, who begins and ends in interiority, has come into existence” (Karatani, 1993: 69). This newly-born, ‘psychological person’ represents one of the formative issues of modernity in the Japanese context: the shift in patterns of ‘selfhood’ held during the premodern, Tokugawa era (1603–1868), to those of the suddenly and feverishly ‘modern’ Meiji era (1868–1912). Karatani characterises this shift as allowing “the ordinary face…to take on meaning” (Karatani, 1993: 57), as allowing the individual to have a sense of selfhood not dependent upon a socially-endowed position or relationship to history.

But herein lies the dilemma of contemporary Japan, for that sense of selfhood, created and maintained on the one hand through individual self-identity and psychological differentiation from its neighbours, is still pulled by a ‘traditional’ value system which places it in a subordinate position to the family, the company, the society, the nation.

That this should be the case is hardly surprising given Japan’s contradictory stance of embracing the modern, western world while still maintaining an image of itself as insular and enjoying an unbroken traditional heritage stretching back over more than two thousand years. It is this duality of national vision, I will argue here, that places on Japanese intellectuals a burden of conceiving of themselves in two essentially oppositional ways. On the one hand, there continues a tremendous awareness of social role and responsibility; while on the other, and especially since the American Occupation of 1945–1952, there exists increasing pressure for individuals to think of themselves as precisely that: individual.
As I mentioned in the Introduction, Kinugasa Teinosuke’s film *Kurutta ippeiji* (*A Page of Madness*, also *A Page Out of Order*, 1926) takes up the theme of this contradictory split in its explicit depiction of young, angry patients in a mental hospital—a fitting metaphor for Karatani’s “psychological person” and the interiority with which s/he is formed. That film had proposed through its allegorical use of Noh masks at a pivotal moment that the imposition of a traditional ‘face’ to the problem of modernity was nothing more than a literal ‘masking over’ of the burden of maintaining a dualised self-identity. Through this film, it becomes clear that this burden is something we can characterise as neurotic. It requires the self to do two things: first, to *be* itself, and second, to stand outside of itself and watch its own performance, in this instance masked by a veneer of pleasant sociability. The issue here is one of an imposition, and it is this imposition of a possibly outmoded, ‘traditional’ face or surface onto a changed reality that brings with it a neurotic reaction. As this chapter will argue, the sense of imposed identity with which Japan had been trying to contend since the Meiji Era acquired added urgency with, first, the economic strengths of the latter half of the 20th century, and then the economic hardships of the late 1980s and 1990s. As Tsurumi Kazuko writes,

> in many societies the basic value orientation of the society as a whole does not change, or changes only slightly, within the lifespan of an individual. There are some societies, however, in which this fundamental value orientation of the overall group undergoes a drastic change within an individual’s lifetime…. In the latter type of society… the individual is obliged to abandon his basic set of values after childhood in favour of a new value orientation…. Japan after the Meiji Restoration… and after World War II happens to fall into [this] second category (Tsurumi, 1970: 4).

It is this drastic readjustment of values that brings to Japan the crisis in identity which operates on the social, macro level, but more importantly, on the individual, micro level. This process of readjustment which “provided divergent principles of adult socialisation” (Tsurumi, 1970: 4), has happened in at least two major periods, but I will argue throughout this book that Japan is still going through such a period. The growing commercialism and consumerism of post-1960s Japan coupled with an increasing sense of Japan’s global position and susceptibility to global influence brings to Japanese public discourse a set of contradictory pulls: to embrace ‘internationalisation’ (*kokusaika*) on the one hand, but also to retain Japanese traditions and awareness of Japanese uniqueness—this