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Position Paper

Marilyn Ivy, 1995: *National-Cultural Phantasms and Modernity's Losses*. In: *Discourses of the Vanishing. Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

The first chapter of Marilyn Ivy's *Discourses of the Vanishing*, proposed to our attention, provides the theoretical framework on the formation of the nation-state \ nation-culture in Japan and its relation to modernity. The formation of Japan as a nation-state is seen as a response to the threat of domination of the "West" in the mid-19th, through the emergence of the unified *modern* "Japanese culture" (4). Thus, Japan is considered to be a "great assimilator", and in identifying the "otherness", the "foreign" is being transformed into a "manageable sign of order". Yet, according to Ivy, the cultural foundations of Japan, should be contextualized in the transformations of the 20th century (i.e. ruptures of modernity), the Second World War being the "metaphor for the loss".

The "modernity", which the author refers to, indicates the relation between nation-state and capitalist colonialism, changes inflicted in identities and subjectivities, relationships to temporality, and institutional procedures (5). As noted by the author, the book aims at linking the culture to the nation, by using the idea of the *imaginary* and pointing to the element of phantasm that lies at the basis of national-cultural communities (4). She employs the concept of "vanishing" to deal with the rhetoric of the loss through historical change, modernist nostalgia and recovering of the past (i.e. going back to the tradition as an unbroken transmission).

What makes the theoretical and conceptual framework employed by Marilyn Ivy particularly interesting, in my opinion, is the linkage of the Critical Theory's conceptual foundations (culture must be studied within the social relations and system through which culture is produced and consumed), with the constructivist body of work on the emergence of the nation-states \ nation-cultures (Anderson and Hobsbawm) and the theoretical resources of the French post-modern theory (Foucault). Although this dialogue between different bodies of work sometimes seems to be overwhelming and rather difficult to follow, in the end, it provides complex analytical tools to examine the relation between cultural resources, nation-building and the outcomes of modernity.