

Marlyn Ivy

Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan

(a position paper by Ivona Opetčeska-Tatarčevska)

My first contact with Marilyn Ivy and the discourse of the vanishing has been fascinating due to its broad analysis of the Japanese society. In the best manner possible, the paper demonstrates the ambivalence of the phenomena and the processes in a modern state drawing its uniqueness precisely from the revival of tradition. This article is thereby particularly inspirational for understanding the ambivalence and developing an analytical vein in that direction.

The ambivalent image of the successful Japanese cultural model living in synergy with the somewhat antipodal technological development of the country has been communicated in a comprehensive manner, inciting one to think that perhaps through this paper we have been offered a model for improving the state of Macedonian culture. Perhaps the internationalization of Japanese culture would form a solid foundation for transforming the Macedonian cultural model still struggling, without the knowledge how, to find a way to get modernized.

And this in particular is how we could make use of M. Ivy's article.

For certain issues Ivy indicates authors such as Cornelius Castoriadis and his *category of the social imaginary*, through which we could theoretically upgrade the topic we have been working on.

The fact that the Japanese image we experience nowadays began its formation in the 18. century has been rather stimulating. With our analysis, therefore, a question has been raised:

- Where has a mistake been made in the formation of the Macedonian image? Provocative to investigate is the connection between the *unified* Japanese ethnicity and the Japanese nation resulting in a successful modern product entitled *Japanese culture*.

This paper is a remarkable discussion on modernity in which the author informs us of the instance of the Japanese national imagination, the self-definition successfully articulated with the fantasies of the West. For the theoretical groundwork of my research, therefore, I have "discovered" the notion of coevalness as one of the

fundamental approaches. Herein lies the knowledge and wisdom of the strategians to remain within Žižek's *national thing* while successfully transiting into modern society.

Ivy's definitions of modern society, one would assume, have been the theoretical landmarks of this project (p. 5). Apart from her own views, the author has selflessly indicated the key theorists of modernity as well.

Considering that at the beginning of the creation of national states there were always brutalities in the process of evening out the differences within the country (p. 6), I find an analogy with the process of political eligibility in including individuals and groups in the society of this part of Europe, which Macedonian society has not been able to eliminate to this day. Even though at one point dissolved, that model has now been multiplied in Macedonia and has once again entangled and obstructed the transitional process of Macedonian culture, since this time political eligibility of each separate ethnicity is required. This text has offered us some quite interesting instances of modernity and phantasmagony.

I would have to admit that I might need more than two readings to fathom the notions of the *quasi-colonial original* and *quasi-colonized copy*.

The comparisons with the West as a potential discourse are another idea emerging from this text, but my own idea in this project has not matured sufficiently in order to take that direction.

I find the development of the specific model of multiculturalism in Japan, and the possibility of a broader definition of multiculturalism (p. 10), particularly useful for my future work on the project, as well as the view on folklore as fetishism (p. 11), which is still valid for Macedonia. Through this paper I have found plenty of coincidences between Japan and Macedonia, such as the traditional household organization, as well as the problematic connection between the ethnicity, the national culture and the *loss and revival of tradition* rhetoric, which in Macedonia is being defined as *loss and revival of folklore* (p. 12). The difference is that in Japan it has been located as a marginal phenomenon, whereas in Macedonia it seems to form the main stream of the so-called modern Macedonian state.

It is quite interesting that the mass media have proved essential for the revival in Japan, whereas in Macedonia that part has been played by the process of dissemination of collective knowledge through informal education within the wide network of cultural associations.

It is undisputable that the lost connection with identity in the 70s and 80s was being maintained by the very folk scene.

Whatever the folk scene, it did transpose traditional values, although reducing the religious repertory, or marginalizing or portioning certain ethnic representations. This connection also resulted in the *mourning* process, the nostalgia, the revival, the commemoration of tradition, which climaxed in the mid-90s with the *Synthesis* band. As far as coincidences are concerned, *Synthesis* were quite successful in Japan at the peak of their career.

Ivy has selflessly offered information on authors such as W. Kelly or J. Robertson, T. Bestor or B. Moeran, who treat the issue of identity and tradition, extremely significant for my future work. Ivy's phraseology might slow down the appreciation of the article, but the variety of shortcuts offered is admirable.

One such shortcut might be the comparative analysis of modernity of the state and the traditional search for the roots, or the retrospective listening to the voices of the past in the so-called *scriptural* societies (p. 16).

This approach to oneself is a magnificent convergence, quite the opposite to the modern knowledge creation. A truly remarkable comparison. Even though Ivy considers the return to the primordial voices a sheer folly, from the standpoint of a researcher from and in Macedonia, especially considering recent events, I remain undecided regarding the (un)necessary cry for help from the past in order to resolve a difficult situation.

Phantasmagony therefore is not all that primitive, especially when the degree of state development demands that we call oral history, folklore and national myths for help. Even though it might result in problems regarding the visualization of the models in different regimes.

Page 18 is important as to the Japanese cultural industries and institutions locating the *voices* in the folklore, similarly as in SFRY.

It is interesting to note that in Japan in 1942 an analysis was conducted on the extent and manner of embracing modernity, selecting thereby the model of returning to the *years of traditional culture*.

In that vision wavering between dream and reality a conflict regarding the manner of interpreting the voices from the past emerged. Thereby arised Bakhtin and Volosinov's concept of dialogue, that is, their view on dialoguism as a continual interaction of meanings. We therefore arrive at the intercultural dialogue, which

should constantly reactivate the awareness of competition and tolerance between different definitions of one and the same concept. By inventing tradition (p. 21), Ivy has introduced me with a new research challenge to also turn to Hobsbawn, Terence Ranger and Michail Taussing and their ideas of inventing tradition.

It is sometimes difficult to accept and comprehend discourses of this sort due to the fact that, as a researcher, I live in that reality, become even more entangled in this transitional period, which might jeopardize the objective approach; hence Marilyn Ivy's paper in this stage of my work, through the possibility of the so-called reflective ethnography, has offered me a model of synergizing theory with my field work.

It is a truly inspirational paper, the educational goal of which has been completely achieved.