

Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan. By Marilyn Ivy. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Pp. iii + 270, afterwords, bibliography, index, \$45.95 U.S./\$17.95 U.S., ISBN: 0-2263-8832-8 cloth, 0- 2263-8833-6 pbk.)

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Although no longer on the faculty at Bowling Green State University, Ray Browne continues a vigorous academic life as a writer, publisher, and conference organizer. This book is an apt tribute to his intellect and spirit.

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Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan abounds with rich ethnographic data and theoretical insights to inspire Japan specialists, anthropologists, historians, and students of public culture. The book should especially engage folklorists, however, given Ivy's preoccupation with the "vanishing," traditionally the object of folklore studies. Ivy focuses primarily on "discourses and practices where ethnos, voice, and nation-culture problematically coincide: the register of what is sometimes called the folkloric, sometimes temporalized as the essentially 'traditional,' concurrently located as the 'marginal,'" (p. 12) posing questions that interest folklorists. What does the loss of the "traditional" mean? What role does the "vanishing" play in the operations of Japanese modernity? How does one represent that which resists representation?

Ivy demonstrates how nonstandard Japanese practices of the voice have come to express the "nation-culture." She explains how the "vanishing," stable yet endangered, is commoditized. She studies the "folkloric" and marginal "from the interior of dominant discourses of national-cultural identification to show the critical difference discursively embodied in that very interior" (p. 24). And, especially in chapters four, five, and six, she presents examples of people, practices, and sites that resist the appropriation ("recovery") of the "vanished," to form their own "reserves of pleasure and loss" (p. 243) in contemporary Japan. The book might thus be construed as an endeavor in "anthropology as cultural critique." To some extent, Ivy's problematics overlap those of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in her work on "heritage" (1994).

The discourses that Ivy explores in order to explicate Japan's sense of loss and politics of nostalgia, include travel advertising, the discipline of folklore (nativist ethnology), city planning, mourning practices, and itinerant popular theatre. She first introduces the discourse of "nihonjinron," Japanese theories of Japaneseness, which may be partly engendered by what she theorizes as contemporary Japanese unease "about culture itself, and its transmission and stability" (p. 9).

Chapter Two traces this concern with "authentic Japaneseness" through an analysis of the Japan National Railways advertising campaign, "Discover Japan," and contextualizes it in a revival of interest in folklore studies and Yanagita Kunio. "It was Yanagita's work that first articulated modernity, travel, and ethnography with the belief in a perennial Japan that subsisted in the voices and practices of the 'folk'" (p. 63).

While folklore echoes in the background of her discussion of touristic signs, it becomes the main subject of Chapter Three, a treatment of Yanagita Kunio's *Tono monogatari* (*The Tales of Tono*), and the origins of nativist ethnology (i.e., folklore) in Japan. (Ronald Morse, translator of the *Tono monogatari*, also considered Yanagita Kunio and the folklore movement in a 1990 work.) Ivy describes the production of *The Tales of Tono* in the context of the Meiji period (1867-1911) "crisis of representation." In spite of Yanagita's declaration that he recorded the tales recounted to him "without adding a word or phrase," Ivy characterizes the work as a calculated literary effort to "suture the fissures between forms of representation" (p. 74), between speech and writing. Citing stories as illustrations of the uncanny, she concludes that, through Yanagita's writing, the tales became modernity's "uncanny other" (p. 86). Yanagita's 1910 literary work became canonized as the originary text of Japanese folklore after its republication in 1935, establishing him as the "father of Japanese folklore."

Chapter Four takes up the idea of *The Tales of Tono* as "an originary node for further interpretive exercises around the theme of Japaneseness itself" (p. 98). In particular, Ivy examines Tonoites' appropriation of this canonical text as the basis for civic self-fashioning, the creation of a "Tonopia" (Tono utopia) plan for a "museum-park city." She explores how the fame of *The Tales of Tono* has rendered the town the "homeland of folktales," and, by extension, the "homeland of Japan."

The disembodied voices telling stories of the past that echo through the halls of Tono's museum are re-embodied by mediums who appropriate the

voices of the dead in the next chapter. Chapter Five presents the ethnographic description of Mt. Osore (Mt. Terror), a double of the other world, at once a site of memorialization for individual mourners and for tourists, mourning a more generalized national-cultural loss. Ivy focuses on blind female mediums who perform kuchiyose, or communication with the dead, as pivotal figures. They have become the “focal point for the idealization of the site” (p. 191).

In Chapter Six, Ivy shifts toward less mournful embodiments in a discussion of taishu engeki, a marginalized, itinerant popular theatre sometimes called “third-rate kabuki.” She renders a satisfying, more traditionally ethnographic account of the lifestyle, troupe social structure, training, venues, performance style, and audience of this form, explicating how this “theatre of dreams (...) overturns the ethics and aesthetics of advanced Japanese capitalism, as it discloses the longings of the margins to partake more fully of the affluent realities that it offers” (p. 236).

This book serves as a model for situating ethnography in theory. At times I felt that more might be done with the rich ethnographic data presented in brief in this text, but that would have made it a different book: Ivy’s aim was to play out her ideas through this data, not to write simple ethnography. Further studies focusing on one site or discourse or performance genre might aim for comparable theoretical richness.

It is impossible to do justice to the complexity and depth of Ivy’s analyses in one review; I leave many important ideas unaccounted for. Thick with theory, this book is a challenging read, but richly rewards the attentiveness and energy one brings to it. As a stimulus to thinking about the meaning of doing folklore, it is an important book for folklorists to tackle.

Reference

- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1994. Actualities, Virtualities, and Other Dilemmas of Display. Charles Seeger Lecture, Joint Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology and the American Folklore Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 21 Oct. 1994.

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