

MARIA JOSÉ CANELO

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Oficina n° 96

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Outubro, 1997

Oficina do CES
Centro de Estudos Sociais
Coimbra

OFICINA DO CES

Publicação seriada do

Centro de Estudos Sociais

Praça de D. Dinis

Colégio de S. Jerónimo, Coimbra

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In considering modernism, both as an aesthetic and a social movement, within the emergence of a world order redefinition, the identity question reveals itself as a crucial question. In level with the outlining of new territorial borders, there is a redefinition of national and individual identities, Selves and Others. In particular, the affirmation of new national identities brings about the question of cultural difference, in the internal as much as the external fields. In this paper, I take as a starting point that modernist aesthetics distinguish themselves essentially by the claim to a right to difference, independently on it being individual, of a group or national.

What difference, introduced by whom and with what purposes or consequences are certainly important questions, which I touch, but will opt for not going too deep into, for I will focus basically on aspects of theoretical nature. The cases of the two poems in question, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, by T. S. Eliot e “Metaphors of a Magnifico”, by Wallace Stevens, may cause some surprise in their relation with the theme I propose - are they not, after all, the expression of two *men, white, American, of European ancestry and of a privileged social class...?* Why, where, of whom can we talk about *difference...?! It is obvious that Stevens and Eliot are far from belonging to menaced minorities - but there are two levels where their poetry claims the badge of difference: one of them is at the international level, because their localization is in a nation at the time still peripheral, whose culture suffered from a great anxiety in the international context; the other is at the national level, the specific*

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** This paper was presented at the XVIII Meeting of the Portuguese Association for Anglo-American Studies, at Guarda, March 1997.

context of a massified culture, in the midst of which modernism invents its own place - or else, will invent itself as its Other. Considered as voices of high culture and of America, Stevens' and Eliot's poems can thus be read as forms of invention of a certain cultural difference, which will affirm itself by resorting to different rhetorical strategies of legitimization. Hence, and although this division does not intend to be strict, I would like to study each of these poems in what they reveal of the interruption of central discourse in each of the afore-mentioned levels: "The Love Song...", concerning the establishment of a minority discourse (high culture) within the national context; Stevens' poem as part of the legitimization of an other identity in more vast a context. On the one hand, the rupture of the Self in "The Love Song..." allows for the existence of other Selves, whereas the fragmentation of perception in "Metaphors of a Magnifico" lets one foresee other significations; in both cases, one observes the creation of ambivalent zones of identification, that is, spaces of supplementary signification, which furthermore affirm themselves deliberately against the common reader, clearly addressing a margin of 'elected ones'.

In applying post-colonial theory to the specific case of the United States - already an independent nation for a long time -, as well as to a literary movement such as modernism - which, in its refusal of national boundaries, apparently appeals to some kind of universal identity -, I take as a starting point that it is not possible to turn modernism away from the historical time in which it appeared, namely the eruption of war in Europe and the nationalist climate involving it. I believe the First World War was an event particularly susceptible of reviving the old colonial wounds of the American nation, as much as its pride in a relatively recent independence, and these feelings are nowhere incompatible with its political and economical affirmation already in good progress in the international field. It is therefore in this line that I take the invention of high culture as the cultural prop for the political assertion of the nation at the international level and internationalism as the construction of the international projection which complements it. Any of these cultural inventions thus works as the

derridean supplement which Homi Bhabha considers to be the basic function of minority discourse.

In general, I assume that modernism, in this case U.S. modernism, indeed inaugurated forms of destruction of absolutes which used to set limits to identity and serve purposes of homogenization typical of nationalist rhetoric. In this aspect, it was a potentially liberating project. But the deviation from that intention, in what it reveals of how the difference served only those who disturbed and questioned the least, tends to reveal also the ambiguities of this assertion as the Other/difference and its inherent conservative nature - or maybe what it ultimately reveals is the very ambiguity of the status of difference I am here focusing on, since it is actually the case of an ex-margin which in that precise moment ascends to the center. The duplicity of that position - that half way - shows itself in the representation of difference defended by the poets I deal with here. That ambivalence brings about questions which most certainly go beyond the aesthetic fields from which they sprang, but I intent now to fix my attention on the rhetorical questions, in what they reveal of the process of destabilization and affirmation of difference.

As Homi Bhabha's post-colonial theory is fundamental for my analysis, namely his notion of the affirmation and functioning of the minority discourse as a discourse of difference, I will now briefly present this critic's concepts on which my study relies: Bhabha defines the affirmation of minority discourse as the opening of spaces of supplementary signification inside central discourse. These spaces claim the right to be acknowledged as difference and demand the invention of new forms of cultural relations, namely in terms of negotiation and articulation.

One departs, thus, from the definition of minority discourse not as a counter-discourse, but as a 'supplement', in the sense Derrida ascribed to the concept, and this assumption has two consequences: the first is that it implies the construction of

minority discourse in a space shared with central discourse - and not in the outside, as the notion of counter-discourse would imply; this means that it is central discourse which contains in itself the existence of the supplement - as the Other which sustains the definition of the Self (hence the common self-assumption of minority discourse as absence). This opposition Self/Other is also the sustainer of a certain hierarchy of values, as well as of the exercise of a single authority. The other consequence is that the question of the supplement assumes the existence of the so-called 'interstices', or 'liminal spaces', in which cultural negotiations take place and which work as the corridors of dialogue between both discourses. This notion of hybrid spaces establishes a logic of possibility, indefinition, problematization of sides and reverse sides and of the validity of limits - including those of language as a vehicle of communication.

It is precisely taking as a basis Saussure's theory of the basic disjunction between sign and reality that Bhabha builds up his whole critical theory. Between those two instances, Bhabha argues, is settled the *différance* of writing, whose dis coincidence with the original necessarily reveals the principle of difference as insurmountable and the 'transparency' (that is, the capacity for an intelligible translation of the Other/difference) as impossible because in the process of cultural translation there is always something that rests 'beyond the sentence'. Bhabha therefore refuses the concept of cultural diversity as conducive to formulas such as multiculturalism, which manage only to promote a divided representation of difference, being consequently unable to envisage interaction. On the contrary, a dialectics of cultural difference, as the one he himself proposes, anticipates a dynamic coexistence between knowledges and critical cultural reflections, which, in the confrontation that is the moment of enunciation and differentiation, authorize the creation of force fields, capacities and references. In this way, a different notion of authority is also created: one that does not preexist, but rather emerges in the very act of the enunciation of difference.

In what concerns the working method of minority discourse, it is possible only within that dynamics of difference: basically, minority discourse establishes a principle of ambivalence in the interior of central discourse, which comes to upset the balance of the whole system and can be felt at several levels, for instance, that of language. The invalidation of any immediate relation between significant and signifier, as well as of the logic of differentiation inherent to the whole linguistic system, make it possible for the disclosure of language as a cultural construction and, as a consequence, as a badge for claiming difference. Temporality is another of those levels, since that essential disjunction between word and thing creates what Bhabha calls the 'enunciative split', which destroys the logic of synchrony that would apply to exact correspondence (identity); the break uncovers a divided temporality - a 'time split' -, proving the existence of a third time of enunciation which escapes representation and which is in fact what allows the constant but diverse reappropriation of the same cultural aspects (or of what lies 'beyond the sentence'), by means of carnavalization, camouflage or nonsense. Through this reappropriation, the dialectics of difference interrupts the ideas of continuity and linearity, against which Bhabha sets the idea of an interstitial temporality of permanent negotiation situated in the present, which thus subverts the ideas of a linear course of history and the significance of the community. In other words, a valuation of culture as 'enunciative act' (at the performative level, that is), while it fixes itself in the present of action, makes it possible to liberate the Others who had been turned into objects in the pedagogical discourse of the past. Once set free, the Others hence become the subjects of their own histories and experiences.

But, according to Homi Bhabha, there is still another element of crucial importance in the identity affirmation, as the frame which generally draws the limits of culture: the nation. It is the nation that, frequently claiming culture as a cohesive homogeneous whole, allows for more fixed definitions, independently of their degree of rigor. As a frame of cultural references, the nation is the background of any assertion, since even the differentiation of an individual or of a group works on a basis

of 'disidentification' with the settled reference picture. In such a context of relation of the subject with the nation, Bhabha isolates two rhetorical strategies of appeal, the pedagogical and the performative. Identifying the former with a nationalist discourse which claims the existence of the people in its own auto-justification, the latter strategy on the contrary finds a space of self-creation for the individual, who will him/herself in this manner make use of the significance of the nation in his/her own constitution as subject. In my analysis, I will take these poems as performative gestures of auto-affirmation which strike at absolutes such as homogeneous formulae of culture and nationality.

Concerning the study of the poems, I want to stress that the subversion of a linear temporality results in both of them from a critique of language, which, in turn, grants the affirmation of difference, hence it will be mainly in these two aspects that my attention will fall upon. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", by T. S. Eliot, dates from 1915 and is published through Ezra Pound in the magazine that was the engine of modernist poetics in the United States, *Poetry A Magazine of Verse* (6.3 [June 1915]: 130-35), a publication which will openly assume a nationalist position. Eliot's poem is published with some difficulty, despite all of Pound's emphasis on its difference and its mark of individuality and excellence. To place "The Love Song..." in *Poetry* was like placing a bull in a china shop though, not to mention that the poem and the poetry this magazine usually published had nothing in common. I point out this conflict because it is out of it that the individualizing potential of Eliot's poem stands forth and also because it provides evidence of its role in the assertion of high modernism as an other discourse inside the uniformizing rhetorical discourse of this magazine. By contrast, the reality of "Prufrock" is a divided reality, of hesitation, insecurity, doubt and separation, which slips into a nature of mutation, representation (in the dramatic sense) and compromise, which goes largely against the stable and essentialist nature typical of

assertions of identity. This other image of the Self lies open, first of all, in the insufficiency of language, which is complemented by the effect of perspectivism.

The constant perception of the look of the others over the Self/Prufrock builds a deaf dialogue between the representation of the Self by others and the one the Self himself constructs, ultimately giving way to two irreconcilable realities which language is unable to solve. Moreover, the resort to a temporality of repetition, resulting in a constant deferral of action, stresses the idea that identity is not presence, thus, it can not be represented - nor controlled. So, Eliot's poem illustrates the metaphor of the post-colonial as a free look, by means of which difference constructs its destabilizing power while managing the reverse it had been ascribed as a sign of its alterity: invisibility and lack. Escaping representation, the Self in the poem circulates freely and is thus able to hit central representations without allowing them to hit back - because it can not be named/represented/dominated.

If we begin by looking carefully into the effect of perspectivism, we see that it is the poetical Self, Prufrock, who introduces his own impressions as well as the look and impressions of the others over himself. But, always boasting his refusal of representations of himself not 'authorized' by himself, the closest Prufrock gets at definitions about his identity is by anti-identities, or definitions of subalternity:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
.....
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous -
Almost, at times, the Fool.

Prufrock is thus observer and object; he is the one that asks “Shall I part my hair behind?”, after he realizes in the others the look revealing his aging (“ ‘They will say: ‘How his hair is growing thin!’ / . . . / They will say: ‘But how his arms and legs are thin!’) - , so that the comparisons he draws when describing the landscape end up revealing his own condition as well. It is himself, not the night, “[a] patient etherised upon a table”; it is he the one who feels exposed and resents the imposed definitions as reducing formulae designed to dispose of him conveniently - in Prufrock's own image, by hanging him on the wall and preventing him from moving around and have a say (“And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, / When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall / Then how should I begin / To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?”)

As for the love story, which would normally be the most obvious layer of interpretation given its reference right in the title, its systematic deferral comes actually to reveal it as a mere subterfuge for the presentation of the double discursivity which combines with the double image of the figure, coming to interrogate the validity of language, as what is said is constantly called into question: “That is not what I meant at all; / That is not it at all”, “It is impossible to say just what I mean!” What he wants to say we never know - language is not good enough to convey it; reality is, like Prufrock himself, *between* what he wants to say and what the words say.

The fragmentation of this Self is reinforced by the way he feels the others' look as an act of dismembering, when he isolates their look over separated parts of his body (the bald spot in the middle of his head, the hair, the collar holding his neck, the arms, the legs, up to the point of seeing his head being served in a tray). That suggestion of disintegration of identity adds emphasis to the impossibility of perception of entirety - a wholeness that on the contrary corresponds to the finished representations Prufrock refuses. It is accordingly that we are given the representation of the others from whom Prufrock distances himself, as a whole, a uniformed identity which one knows by heart because its action is uniform and predictable (“For I have known them all already,

known them all - / Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons”, “And I have known the eyes already, known them all –”, “And I have known the arms already, known them all”).

This distancing in relation to the representation of identity is exactly the direct correspondence of the metaphor of the love song: the love gesture (of giving and sharing, of a certain concession, therefore, in what concerns the identification with the other) and, in particular, the continuous deferral of its consummation, takes us directly to the fighting ground itself, that is, the field of affirmation of this Self as an Other. For that constant avoidance of the moment of sharing and identifying fulfills exactly the isolation in relation to the central discourse as mass culture - and what theme could be more banal and traditionally more charged with emotion than that of love...? The abdication of love thus indicates the option by intellectuality, which, in the case of modernism, would come to constitute itself as the other of feminine eroticism. This choice is intimately connected with the intentions of seriousness that were to carry out the rehabilitation of art. In other words, this way art protected itself from the discrediting sentimentality associated with femininity. Well, sentimentality, superficiality and generalization are certainly what the voice in the poem most strongly refuses, so they are projected instead on the figures of the women who repeatedly cross the room. In “The Love Song...” there is no love except that for the intellectual game of doubt, possibility, reformulation, being, not being, seeming, wishing to be. Maybe for the very construction of the identity of this Self as alterity.

Also the use of irony adds to the representation of the inefficiency of language - in that it always leaves more unsaid than it really says, while at the same time it takes part in the construction of a temporality of suspension. Time results in a constant interruption of the linear discourse of ordering that would normally be the description of the subject and the action. The vague questions “Do I dare / Disturb the universe?”, “So how should I presume?”, “And how should I begin?” - continually take back the discourse only to engage in a habit of expectation which is repeatedly frustrated. The

basic temporality in the poem is rendered concrete in the repeated and futile walking and chatting of the women who “come and go / Talking of Michelangelo”: it is a continuous but empty present, time that is merely time, not a space for some sort of concrete action. This time does not recognise the past nor predicts the future and therefore clearly comes into conflict with the ideal of temporal linearity typical of pedagogical discourse.

As I have already mentioned, this refusal of a logic temporality is related to the indefinition of identity that is the status Prufrock calls his own: while refusing a ready made history, Prufrock cancels the possibility of a past; and, considering that in this poem there is no action nor does one ever know what Prufrock is after, there is no future either. This being so, time is simply a vicious circle of permanent rebirth, where the present piles itself up and therefore reinforces itself alone because the only essence of time allowed here seems to be that of doubt itself. Time shares in that same reality of possibility (it is a time of “visions and revisions”), hence it can be always in question: “In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.” The only hypothesis Prufrock formulates is actually in a time that was not and will not be, but could only have been: “And would it have been worth it, after all”. This repeated and unambitious time, which rolls languidly on the floor side by side with the Self (“And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully / . . . / Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me”) is also a strong menace to the time of concreteness of pedagogical poetry, which was tranquilizing because it was the way to make true a (not rarely divine) mission. A time of suspension like this is terrifying also in so far as it blocks the temporality full of meaning which feeds the survival of the nation itself; it is what Bhabha terms ‘a ghostly present’, which becomes an unlimited intermediary, ready to abolish the sources of past and future. In “Prufrock” the subject’s initiative as possibility to impose a certain pacing to time (because it would interrupt its autonomous action) is reduced to an absurd insignificance, adding to the subject’s frailty: “Do I dare to eat a peach?”

It is easy to understand that these rhetorical strategies build a discourse of difficult access, which however means to be so, as it is a discourse of difference aiming at a separation from the established cultural formula. The nature of individual assertion in particular, emerging everywhere in the poem, illustrates very well the philosophy of high culture, while it shows how much its settlement meant the restoring of individual value, which had meanwhile been relegated to the periphery and thus made invisible within mass culture. It is for that reason that, by assuming the mask himself, Prufrock early unmasks the pretension of unveiling his own identity he understands in the others' gestures: "There will be time, there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet". This means that whoever they see is not himself - because he does not *want* to allow for his identity to be enmeshed in the whole. Another serious reading difficulty results from the ambiguous use of anonymity. In fact, Prufrock's option for the space of the Other is blurred by his simultaneous ambition of universality: on the one hand, the refusal of ready made formulae calls into question the very identification of the voice with the name in the title, aggravated by the fluidity of the voice throughout the poem; on the other hand, the "you" that appears in the beginning of the the poem, "Let us go then, you and I", is never clearly distinguished from an interlocutor within the poem or outside it - the reader him/herself. However, if it is the reader, the basic strategy of the poem works a lot more in the sense of defamiliarising or even rejecting, than in any sort of approximation - and to realise that one needs only to pay attention to the perfectly repulsive descriptions of this "any" city: "The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, / The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes / Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening, / Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains."

The identity of this Self moves then, as Homi Bhabha would say, in an interstitial space between the object the others make of Prufrock and the subject he himself constructs; between the pedagogical and the performative. While refusing the identity the others invent, Prufrock rejects, after all, a finished history: he is no prophet,

no Hamlet; he is only the self *in process*. In his rejection of uniformization, Prufrock is also the reverse of the linear hero of nationalist pedagogy, precisely because he is the deferred identity that does not exist yet (“And how should I begin?” and “Do I dare?” are questions repeated throughout the poem). This definition in the negative and affirmation by absence shows this voice as the post-colonial supplement: the voice takes the place of, since it can not be - because it is the Other. It is in this way that Prufrock manages his status of subalternity to his own benefit, I mean, it is by positioning himself inside central discourse that he invents his own space, by reinventing the status of absence - so, it is from inside the space of the not being that he intervenes.

Prufrock is therefore a free voice which refuses homogenizing formulae as well as great destinies and, while calling into question the principles of presence and representation, he subverts traditional notions of political agency and narrative mastery. The rejection of the identification that would be a fixed identity is so strong that the construction or deconstruction of individuality as Other ends up turning against itself and proposing the fragments as the only possible representation of cultural difference.

“Metaphors of a Magnifico”, by Wallace Stevens, seems to me to illustrate two important accessories of modernist identity discourse: an empowering vocation to universality (present also in Eliot's poem) and, simultaneously, a strategic positioning in difference which is represented by means of a metaphor of plurality of meanings, containing the same idea of plurality I have already identified in “Prufrock”. I intend therefore to show how Stevens' poem enacts the other gesture of openness in the affirmation of identity as the Other: the gesture that constructs a space of signification where difference, in this case national difference, acquires another potential of projection in the international field, while at the same time a legitimization of that difference is put under way. A fact worthwhile mentioning is that the poem was

published in 1918 in the magazine of arts and critique *The Little Review* (5.2 [June 1918]: 4), a publication with a strong internationalist orientation, which however publishes two “American Numbers”, extraordinarily but hardly accidentally so close to the armistice. These numbers aimed at nothing else than spreading the excellence American poetry was so eager to boast of, now that the nation was definitely on the good road to equality with the European centers of cultural authority. One should bear in mind that after the end of the war the political and economic rise (and thus the potential of influence) of the United States is meteorical.

Through the exercise of questioning the language and its capacity of apprehension of reality, Stevens' poem ends up calling into question the relation of the Self with the Other, while legitimating claims to difference concerning the linguistic field which were not conflicting with the whole of the modernist enterprise. So, contradicting the title, the poem actually dismisses metaphor as an image with capacity to condense reality and to communicate:

Twenty men crossing a bridge,
Into a village,
Are twenty men crossing twenty bridges,
Into twenty villages,
Or one man
Crossing a single bridge into a village.

The poem builds itself out of the systematic repetition of this image, which continually resists abstraction: “This is old song / That will not declare itself . . . / . . . / That will not declare itself / Yet is certain as meaning” - and each time the voice/the look prepares itself to mould the intellectual image, “the meaning escapes”, and all that is left is the same initial reality, just like in “The Love Song...” the identity of the Self as Other resisted formulation. At the same time, the impossibility of converting reality in

another reality, as the tautologies show, reflects the same impossibility of transparency that is revealed in "Prufrock". While refusing the metaphor (- as the "metaphysics of things", just like Master Alberto Caeiro was also teaching in Portugal by that time), this voice rejects a stable reference system (which is the same as saying, a model of conversion of the Other) which would provide the reader with the expected image, or, at least, with a familiar formulation. Thus, such a rejection of a fixed meaning certainly implies a rejection of a preexisting origin/authority as source of absolute meanings.

Wallace Stevens' very theory of metaphor suggests the idea of interstitiality fit of post-colonial discourse: Stevens argues that this figure works by similarity, or approximation, between literal and figurative meanings, coming to supersede the traditional binarity of word and object (Self and Other). Thus, reality is never the object itself, but only that which this poet also calls "a structure of reality" - which means, a structure that the Self constructs, in his/her discovery of similarity between things. When asserting that all the look and the imagination can apprehend is similarity alone, Stevens attests the impossibility of transparency and the existence of an insurmountable difference between being and seeming, presence and representation - and we have already seen how the manipulation of those two conditions forms one of the most efficient strategies of interruption of entirety/identity. If concrete reality, necessarily mediated by the imagination, is unattainable, what comes to be formed is a third object - that Self which Prufrock also leaves hanging somewhere between the image the others construct and his own.

Getting back to the poem, twenty men crossing a bridge into a village are only twenty men crossing a bridge into a village and the same as a man crossing the bridge, as they could be something else - and yet full meaning escapes. From here on, the universal appeal can be situated in two movements: while the generalization expands the meaning, suggesting its universality ("one man"/"twenty men", "a bridge"/"twenty bridges", "a village"/"twenty villages"), the elaboration made by the imagination can vary, being thus individualizable, which means that it inhabits the territory of

interpretation which escapes the look (it is the space of cultural difference). The image of the poem is then the possibility of meanings which radicalizes the ideal of the purified image which, in the theory of one of the theoretical exponents of modernism, Ezra Pound, had such a power for liberating meaning that it could surpass any time and space limits. The formulation of such an image however implied the sacrifice of entirety/identity, exploding meaning in a plurality of fragments which reflect cultural difference(s).

Despite the resort to a very unpretentious and purified language, this poem frustrates the reader's expectations with the same ease as "The Love Song..." did, starting by the title itself. What looked like irony at first sight, since metaphors are exactly what is absent from the poem, may not be simply so, if we manage to understand that the greatest challenge lies exactly on the capacity to assume the absence of a fixed meaning - and here we have high modernist irony at its best. So, and certainly in parallel with Eliot's poem, "Metaphors of a Magnifico" locks itself, makes a stand at every attempt to formulation, repeats itself, confuses the reader in the asides that mingle the tautologies, disappoints in the very tautological solution. Given the resistance of reality, all that is left - like in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" - is the look, which is able to wonder without fixation nor control and to build freely and individually its own representations of the world. Furthermore, the radicality of generalization this poem also contains brings about the exemption of any temporal dimensions of past or future; the 'definition' in Stevens' poem is out of time, establishing a present as continuous as that of "Prufrock", which comes to stress, in this case, its universal appeal. It is a time of simultaneity which invites to identification (in plurality), once the field of acceptance of readings has been extended. It is also in this sense that anonymity works, in this poem still in more radical a way than in "Prufrock", denouncing how much the modernist project of difference was also marked by the anxiety of a certain identification.

These rhetorical strategies thus set up a theory of possibility which necessarily authorizes difference. Nevertheless, that idea is not independent from imperialist intentions conveniently hidden beneath the cover of universalism, which however emerge in the way difference is actually dealt with, namely, by using strategies of absorption alone. To my mind, though, what matters the most is to understand that it is departing from this definition of an identity of possibility that the legitimization of the nation's aspirations to centrality is carried out; in other words, this identity which authorizes all difference, applied to the American people, on the one hand authorizes their own vision of the world, while on the other aims at annulling their lack of a historical tradition, in as far as it renders the people available to other influences, in the sense of an infinite capacity of identification with difference. This way, the notion of plurality/difference shows itself not to be incompatible with that of centrality/identity; the center after all only expands - exactly as the American cultural identity under construction and in search of a place within the Western tradition after all aimed at. Finally, the ideal of fragmentation does not go beyond appearance, as it comes to be inevitably harmonized in what is after all a mere reconstruction of the center.

From all this, I believe one can conclude that, on the one hand, and although still far from being able to envisage an equal dialogue between cultures, the ideal of differentiation and fragmentation we find in both poems, at least in theory, aims at asserting a notion similar to that of cultural difference, in the same way that allows for the consideration of a positioning on a third category of interstitiality between absolutes (a category of 'in-betweenness'), thus showing how this modernism indeed anticipated post-colonial discourse. The spaces between Prufrock-the Self and Prufrock-the Other, between what he says and what he means to say, or, in Stevens' poem, between the capacity of saying of the word and the capacity of being of reality are, in short, the assertion of cultural hybridity.

However, and on the other hand, this modernist principle does not come up to liberating authorizing post-colonial theories like Homi Bhabha's because it is unable to

assume culture, as a field imbued with differences, in a process of permanent negotiation. That is, it fails in perceiving culture in a logic of interdisciplinarity which asserts 'difference' and not 'plurality', 'hybridity' and not 'multiculturalism'. Because Eliot's and Stevens' gestures of differentiation fail flatly when it comes to the articulation of difference; they establish compartments only, being afterwards unable - or unwilling - to negotiate with other minorities. Quite on the contrary, they protect themselves against other minorities, thus locking the compartment they had managed to affirm within central discourse. To confirm this theory, one must only have a look at the relations of high-modernism with women or Afro-Americans. All this takes one to consider the deeper nature of this new identity the new American nation wanted to project - or to export: an Other with a right to individuality but identical enough to hold also the right to belong to the center?

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