

Postmodernity and fin de siècle in Uruguay¹

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On the eve of the second millenium and after over a hundred and fifty years of independence—at least in the formal sense—Uruguay is in the course of evaluating the first years of democracy following the most repressive dictatorship in its history. This evaluation is necessarily tentative, since it precedes the elections. It occurs within an environment in which political goals are disparate, in an environment of conflict over economic models of development and modernization, of debate about the question of whether those guilty of violations of human rights during the military dictatorship should be brought to justice, debates about how to face the future and how to put the past behind.

In this article, I wish to outline some of the cultural debates that have taken place during a period of rapid change and tentative “redemocratization.” For obvious reasons this cannot be a definitive evaluation of twentieth century Uruguayan culture; rather I shall examine those metaphors that enable the nation to think and represent itself as the “imagined community,” especially in the light of postmodernism, which not only dissolves the barriers between high culture and popular culture but also crosses national boundaries. This raises the question of whether, in the light of postmodernism, the nation is still a useful framework for cultural analysis.

Postmodernism: Between Myth and Metaphor

Discussions over postmodernism tend to take on a different inflection, depending on the context and the participants in the debate. Indeed Jonathan Arac has complained that the terms of the debate are still unclear and adds: “A great deal of the controversy in this debate

depends on misunderstandings, not at all surprising across so wide a range of disciplinary and national traditions, which obstruct significant direct engagement with the argument, motives, and implications of the various positions.”²

The international discussions centering on postmodernism were introduced into Uruguay during the last years of the dictatorship but only reached a broader public with democratization (1985). The first discussions centered on architecture, but gradually broadened in scope until they reached the newspapers. At the present time, there is an academic debate among social scientists and some sociologists but also some awareness of postmodernism outside the academic community.³ One tendency on the left is to view “the postmoderns” or the “postmos” as depoliticized rightwingers, while others distinguish between progressive and reactionary tendencies. For some people, postmodernism means simply the exhaustion of Marxism and the need for a new social and economic pact to achieve modernization. In contrast, for others it is a problem unique to post-industrial societies and has little to do with the underdevelopment of Latin America.

The emergence of the new right on the cultural and political scene has been central to this debate and, indeed, constitutes a new factor in the intellectual history of the country. The new right includes a significant number of younger intellectuals—former militants of the radical left, many of them recently returned from exile—who have now been incorporated into the government party; it also includes technocrats, some of whom have been educated abroad. The discourse of the new right or the *nouveaux philosophes* of Uruguay focuses on the question of modernization. Disillusioned with Marxism, they have accepted positions of responsibility in various branches of the administration—something which, though not unusual in other parts of the West, is without precedent in the modern history of Uruguay, since up to the time of the military coup of 1973 the intelligentsia had either refused to participate in the government or at least, maintained a critical position towards it. They distanced themselves from the official political and cultural policies and aligned themselves during the sixties with the popular movement organized by the left.⁴

At the same time some members of the political and professional elite take the view that postmodernism may be described or understood as a historical period that began after the Second World War, or perhaps after the Cuban revolution or the Vietnam war or between 1968 and 1973 (the period of growing social unrest and of the coups in

Uruguay and Chile). According to this view, it is the era of rock, television and video, of the boom in Latin American literature, of satellites and the space age, of dependency and late capitalism, of multinational corporations and shopping centers (which began to be built in the eighties, replacing old style galleries), of the Third World and computers, of the crisis in ideologies, of the egoistic and laissez-faire seventies, of the godless eighties, of restrictive democracy and real socialism. The term postmodernism may include any of these elements, though not necessarily as part of a single discussion.⁵

My own view is that we are indeed, whether we like it or not, in the postmodern period, a period that in the "First World" corresponds to post-industrialism, but in Latin America and especially in Uruguay is more closely related to certain economic models of development. In fact, the postmodern debate in Uruguay embraces such questions as how modernization can be achieved—whether through privatization or the nationalization of the economy and the Bank—educational reform, human rights and the dictatorship, the crisis of the left. Thus postmodernism occurs in Uruguay at a moment when the "fatted calf" grows lean and when in a period of controlled democracy, the military continues to have a political and not merely a professional role.

Yet the question of postmodernism is even more complex in Latin America where, as Fernando Calderón has observed, it exists simultaneously with premodernity and modernity.⁶ The danger is that by including everything or nothing in postmodernism, the debate merely becomes an automatic reflection of the metropolitan debates that occurred in very different contexts, rather than the exploration of our own circumstances. The debate acquires relevance in the context of our culture and history only when it is viewed against the background of the unequal and contradictory development of Uruguay and the rest of Latin America.

It is in the light of this problematic postmodernism that Uruguayan culture and the nation in general have begun to live their fin de siècle. The century's end is marked above all by a sense of despair, particularly among the young—including both those who choose to emigrate and those who are without the resources to get away. Theirs is not a tragic or melodramatic despair, but the mediocre, grey despair of a middle class that has emerged not from a catastrophe but from the slow deterioration produced by the economic crisis, dictatorship and the lack of any positive goals.

Under these circumstances the slogans that belonged to the period before the military government when Uruguay was the land of the fatted calf—slogans such as “There’s no place like Uruguay,” the “Athens of the River Plate,” the “Switzerland of America” or the “Welfare State” have now acquired an ironic ring. Along with the totalizing narratives of the past, the constituting myths of national identity, (“the Switzerland of America,” “the land of the fatted calf,” “the Welfare State”) have become ancient history. Nor since the dictatorship has there been anything to take their place, a fact that that perhaps explains the desperation summed up in the graffito “Some are born lucky and some are born Uruguayan.”

Despite this despair, in this electoral year of 1989, many slogans also reflect the need for change, for “qualitative change” or a “leap forward.” This contradictory combination of demands for change and the recognition of the fact that programs of change are unworkable is, however, only a surface manifestation of the deeper convictions that history may be moving too fast for a country in which a high level of consciousness and culture accompanies the awareness that Uruguay cannot even be counted among the privileged nations of the periphery.

Consensus and Cultural Malaise

National consensus is often built on the unity that comes from opposition to oppression. At the end of the dictatorship, and consequently with the end of resistance to the dictatorship the national consensus, which had united Uruguayan society against the military and which for some time was embodied by (brought together in) the organization known as CONAPRO, began to break up.⁷ There were now new rules of the game. While during the dictatorship it was “everybody against the government” and the whole country was united against the paternal authority of the military, it is now “every man for himself.” The new rules of the game have brought about confrontations between different economic and political groups but also between the young and the old, men and women. The renovation (that some people refer to as modernization) and the restoration of democracy obviously have not separated Uruguay from its history and ideology. While during the dictatorship there was no possibility of debate, once democracy was restored the tensions of a society marked by different degrees of guilt led to the end of the old

consensus. This guilt originated from the fact that the Uruguayans realized consciously or unconsciously that they had emerged from the catastrophic years of the dictatorship without having cleared up their doubts and suspicions and without having brought to justice those who were responsible for it. They know that those who have violated the most fundamental of human rights continue to live in the same society. One sector of society, the government, believes that amnesty and not punishing the guilty is a form of closure, a way of silencing guilt under the pretext of reconciliation.

The malaise of Uruguayan culture has therefore an ethical origin, something that became clear recently when sectors of the opposition headed by the Tupamaros attempted to submit to general referendum the law passed in December 1986 which proclaimed the "Expiration of the State's Punitive Authority." According to Lawrence Wechsler in the *New Yorker*, the law amounted to an amnesty for the military's violation of human rights between 1973 and 1985.⁸ The "battle for the referendum" lasted for two years, and though the law was upheld by a majority of fifty-two per cent, most of the population of Montevideo and other big cities voted against it. Nevertheless, it appears that the majority of the population prefers to live with guilt. This "bad conscience," this fear of losing the love of the military father, divides society. This situation has affected the whole of Uruguayan culture, and it is in the light of this situation that we should interpret what has occurred since the early eighties. For the gesture of the referendum cannot remove the feeling of guilt of a society, part of which is disposed to live without justice and without an adequate moral consciousness.

There is another contributing cause to the malaise of contemporary Uruguayan society—the impossibility of facing the fact that the dictatorship has affected national culture and consciousness, despite predictions to the contrary during the final years of dictatorship and the first year of the new democracy. Indeed, the elections of November 1984 seemed like a return to the past; the University had been refashioned, intellectuals who had been silenced or exiled were able to return and participate in cultural life; cultural and publishing ventures were started or were continued. The illusion lasted only a short time. Since Uruguayan culture and society had been fragmented during the dictatorship, the attempt to suture and rebuild national culture in the new democracy was much more traumatic than many had thought, or had desired. This difficult transition was

registered in several publications; in *Brecha* for example, during 1986, there was a series of short articles on the theme of the trauma of the return to democracy. In 1985, there were conferences and seminars to explore and register the experience of exile and imprisonment, for example in the Oral History Institute sponsored by the Socialist Party. The intense debate around the “cultural blackout” of the country certainly continues down to the present and will no doubt continue into the future.

In this light, the metaphor of “the backward glance” (literally, “los ojos en la nuca”) is particularly revealing. It was used by the right, and specifically by President Sanguinetti in several of his speeches during 1986 and it is also the title of a regular section in the left-wing newspaper, *La República*. The image refers to the relation between future and past and by implication to the present. It is used, on the one hand, as a reproach of the right, directed towards those who wish to remember or revise the past (and thus is used in a negative sense) and, on the other, as a reminder that the best way to avoid committing errors in the future is to learn from the past. The metaphor is especially useful for understanding recent history and the society’s sense of guilt. But it is and has been used in academic discussions, in cultural discussions, and in general in letters and in projects of economic reform. It is a metaphor also used in relation to the attitude of those returning from exile or the state bureaucrats who had lost their positions under the dictatorship and have now returned to their former posts. The metaphor also separates those who want to return to the past from those who want to start afresh. For many, the real project of the new stage of democracy was to bring back the period before the military takeover. For others, on the contrary, the project was to bury the past and create new conditions, since the dictatorship had isolated Uruguay from the rest of the world, and the country was now out of step with the technological and political progress achieved elsewhere. “The backward glance” was thus an expression of Uruguayan guilt.

The recent publication of a number of historical novels is a further indication of this revision of the past. At least four novels have been published in the last few years that deal with historical characters and incidents from the nineteenth century. For instance, Tomás de Mattos’ *Bernabé, Bernabé!* (1988) can be read as a revision of the past, while it also functions as a metaphor for the present. The novel is based on the genocide of the Charrúa Indians in the year 1830 by two

of the leading protagonists of Uruguayan independence, Francisco Rivera and his brother, Bernabé. In fact, it is Bernabé who commits "the deed," while his brother, one of the first presidents of Uruguay, is the one who gives the orders for the massacre. The narrator of the novel is a woman historian. But the novel also touches on extremely sensitive political topics, as was evident from the polemics in intellectual circles that greeted its publication. Indeed the novel itself suggests parallels with the present since the voice of the prologue declares: "I have chosen Bernabé, Bernabé as the spearhead of the publication of the Narbondo-Peguy collection (and hopefully it will not be a broken spear), not because I prefer it to the other texts or because I wanted to follow a tenuous chronological order, *but because it seems to me to be a text that is close to this time which is still marked by the Nuremberg trials*" [my italics]. The writer of the prologue dates the writing of the text, Tacuarembó, 12 of November 1946, that is, around the period of the Nuremberg trials. The present-day reader, however, (that is, the reader marked by the period of decline and by the referendum) cannot help thinking of the contemporary period, particularly since the novel was published in the same collection as the chronicles and testimonials of death, torture and disappearance during the dictatorship. To read Mattos' novel and the story of Rivera, Bernabé and the Charrúas in the light of the dictatorship is to read the metaphors, pretexts, justifications and to understand the character and images of the contemporary period.

The revision of the past in literature also took other forms. With the restoration of democracy a conflict of generations occurred. Whether legitimately or not, the younger generation wanted to supplant those major figures who had been greatly admired and had even become legendary during the period of cultural repression. Thus the so-called generation of 1945, which included the writer Mario Benedetti and the critics Angel Rama and Rodríguez Monegal and which dominated the literary scene in the years before the dictatorship, came under attack from some younger writers. The return of the survivors, the re-evaluation of the past and the commemoration of past glories were not possible without confrontation. One such brief polemic centered on the work of the writer Mario Benedetti, who had lived for many years in Cuba and who became the pretext for a confrontation between the different aesthetic and ideological projects of the two generations. The debate took place in 1987 in the pages of weeklies, journals and newspapers—for instance, *Aquí*, *Brecha*,

Jaque, La República, Punto y aparte, and Cuadernos de Marcha.

In this debate some of the younger generation (though they did not all use the same arguments) proclaimed the end of the literary currents inaugurated by the generation of 1945, which included Mario Benedetti, Juan Carlos Onetti and the poet Idea Villariño. Benedetti's realist aesthetic and his strong political rhetoric, it was claimed, were unsuitable to the present and had nothing more to offer. Furthermore, his poetics were based on a position of intellectual power that stood in the way of the development of the younger generation. In the case of Onetti, critics pointed out the weakness of his latest novels and the sterility of his narrative project. At the same time, the paternalistic tone of those who defended the generation of 1945 did more harm than good, while the debate itself was lacking in substance since the younger generation failed to carry out the revision of literary history that it promised.

Given the fact that university and private research centers have only recently initiated the process of study and analysis of the socio-cultural history of the country during the dictatorship, it is likely that this period of re-evaluation will be prolonged and will affect the Uruguayan fin de siècle.

Uruguayan Culture on the Raft of the Medusa

Gericault's raft can serve as a metaphor for the society's culture. On the raft and attempting to steer it we find young and old, left and right, the marginal and those in power, all of them believing that rescue is at hand.

It is possible that this chaotic situation is simply one of the characteristics of the postmodern period, with its lack of any totalizing project, the proliferation of different tendencies, strange alliances and antagonistic relations between high, popular and alternative cultures.

Although it is only possible to speak in a tentative fashion of the present situation, it is clear that there is no longer a clear hegemonic cultural center such as existed previously, especially during the sixties. Instead, a variety of discourses (none of which are predominate) coexist within Uruguayan culture. There is a relative consensus as to the importance of certain writers—Juan Carlos Onetti, Mario Benedetti, Eduardo Galeano, Armonía Sommers, Cristina Peri Rosi,

Mario Levrero, Tomás de Mattos, Leo Masliah, and certain painters—Luis Solari, Gonzalo Fonseca, Luis Damiani, Clever Lara. Thus, where differences occur it is not over the value of any particular writer or artist, but over cultural policies, and different aesthetic and ideological positions. It might be argued that this is nothing new and that it occurs everywhere. But in the old days this could not be said of Uruguay, where there was a tradition of critics and writers who had shaped an entire cultural period. Thus there was general agreement and recognition of the importance of the work of Carlos Vaz Ferreira, Angel Rama, Torres García, Alberto Zum Felde, Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Mario Benedetti. Despite polemics around these figures, from the vantage point of the present, each one of these offered a totalizing vision of their specific moment.

On the other hand, the disarray characteristic of contemporary cultural policy at the official level is revealed by such incidents as the creation in March 1984 of an Angel Rama Institute, whose existence was immediately forgotten. Foreign dignitaries are presented with the refined and sophisticated sculptures of Agueda di Cancro—an artist who works in glass and with mirrors in order to derealize the object, but this does not prevent the government from patronizing the neo-romantic and neo-modernist writing of Sylvia Puente de Oyenhardt, for whom literary history is frozen in the period before 1920. University and education reforms are announced, though there are no funds to carry them out. The government celebrates International Women's Day; its Minister of Culture and the head of secondary education are women; yet the number of women writers represented in the literature curriculum is infinitesimal. The President receives a much publicized visit from Jacques Derrida and from popular singers such as Luis Aguile, while at the same time the mounted police attack young people at a concert of the British reggae group UV 40. The government opens book fairs and exhibitions of paintings but allows the closure of the National Library for months on end because of electrical faults.

The official left on the other hand, with its bias towards a realist aesthetic cannot deal with the rebellion of some of the younger generation. They ignore culture that does not fit into its models, they discover the Sting because of their work on behalf of the disappeared; they attempt to accept "national rock" but continue to condemn cultural imperialism without further analysis, enclosing themselves in a

cultural ghetto. They celebrate traditional popular culture such as the “murga” (i.e. the musical groups that perform during the Carnival season) or the more recent popular song movement, but they do not produce any analysis of such movements that goes beyond journalism. They celebrate testimonial literature and the non-fictional novel but are disconcerted by certain characteristics of the new vanguard.

It is indeed testimonial literature that has been one of the most important genres of the period following the dictatorship. Testimonials have proliferated, along with the so-called “prison literature” as a form of catharsis of national consciousness. The testimonial represents a new kind of a writing and a political and cultural practice that attempts to recuperate historical memory. At the same time, it demonstrates the erosion of an elitist concept of literature and the introduction of genres (postmodern?) that tend to do away with the distinction between life and art. Testimonial literature is not confined to prison or political literature as is shown by Ramona Carballo’s *La niña, el huevo duro y el chocolate*, the life story of a maid from childhood to maturity. New voices in cultural discourse—young people, women, ex-prisoners or marginal—find ready expression in these testimonials although, despite the commercial success of some of them, their publication does not necessarily imply a change in the Uruguayan literary canon. The most important and popular of such testimonials are Ernesto González Bermejo’s *Las manos en el fuego* and Fernando Butazzoni’s *El tigre y la nieve*, a testimonial that includes fictional elements. In addition, a substantial amount of literature written in prison has been published thanks to a special center founded for this purpose, although this literature is still considered marginal and is not included in literature courses.

At the same time, there is a group of “underground” youth who publish counterculture journals and shout or curse in order to be heard, or utter “bad words” as if this were something new. They are photographed nude; they challenge writers of the older generation such as Benedetti and Onetti and others. They reinvent the wheel out of ignorance of cultural history. Some members of this younger generation (some of whom are already 35 and over) have started new publishing houses and critical journals. For instance, *Ediciones de Uno* publishes national and Latin American authors who are outside the usual networks of publication and distribution. Among these is the critic Uruguay Cortázar who publishes in the journal *La oreja*

cortada and is now publishing feminist criticism. In addition, practitioners of performance art are seeking alternatives to institutionalized cultural space. “Arte en la lona” and “Circo” constitute two experiences of this type. Their performances take place in open spaces, often in unusual spaces and are attended by several thousand people. The first took place during the Montevideo International Theater Festival of 1988 in a basement boxing ring. The ring was used as a stage for poetry readings, rock, candomblé, theater, Carnival music, painting, boxing-matches, wrestling; there was drinking, some nudity and above all freedom to get into the ring and do whatever one liked.⁹ In an article that the organizers published at the event, they asked questions such as “What is cultural power? What is culture? Is it the people, the artists or the Artists? What is criticism? What about youth? What do they do? What do they think, what do they want? Is anything happening in Montevideo? What does ‘arte en la lona’ mean? Why do so few people believe in the open-ended? . . . Why debates? What is a performance? Where are your senses? . . .” In the end, all these questions add up to a single question, “Who are we?”

The young are not the only ones to have tried thinking in new ways. One tendency that has emerged with redemocratization is feminism. Although there were feminist movements in the previous fifty years, none of them achieved the impact of the contemporary feminist movement, which counts almost a dozen organizations and several publications, the most important of which are *Cotidiano Mujer* and *La República de las mujeres* (as a supplement to the newspaper, *La República*). In addition to publications and public events, women have begun to express themselves in new ways. While some of their efforts were only partially successful, (for instance, the literary and artistic event, “Viva la pepa,” whose slogan refers both to disorder and the female sex and which brought together women from all the arts in an attempt to affirm women’s creativity), others, for instance the project for an anthology under the patronage of *Cotidiano Mujer* and *Ediciones de Uno*, were more effective. Yet another initiative was “Manos del Uruguay,” in which women, mostly from the rural areas, produce artisan products which have achieved a certain commercial success. However, this kind of venture owes more to global transnational culture which originates in New York and Tokyo and has more to do with non-traditional exports than with feminism as such.

There are groups that belong neither to the official government

sector nor to the official left nor to the youth underground. For instance the group around the journal *Poética* stands for a rigorous aesthetic that has much in common with Anglo-American Modernism but has little public visibility. Yet another apolitical high culture tendency (though one that has few adherents) has the aim of bringing the country up to date in contemporary theory. This group has been responsible for inviting Derrida, Hillis Miller and Geoffrey Hartman among others. Although supported by the Ministry of Culture, the National Academy of Letters, and the Fulbright Commission, its impact has been negligible because of its closed elitism and its pronounced contempt for Uruguayan cultural tradition.

As for artistic production as such, the picture is not very encouraging. The new narrative with few exceptions (for instance, Tomás de Mattos' *Bernabé, Bernabé!*, Alicia Migdal's novel, *La casa de enfrente* [1989] and Leo Masliah's *La historia transversal de Floreal Menéndez*) is provincial and anachronistic or superficially experimental. Writers seem trapped in badly-digested magic realism or plain realism or in the ludic metadiscursive writing exemplified at its best by the work of Teresa Porcckanzki. What sets Tomás de Mattos apart is his sense of irony, which (whether in the short story or in the novel) undercuts narrative convention. Installed in Jonah's whale (the scene of one of his short stories) or using a woman historian and specialist in the nineteenth century as his narrator, he has an imaginative register that is unusual in our literature. Alicia Migdal, a poet and film critic has just published a disturbing novel, *La casa de enfrente*. Pastiche and interiorization allow her not only to bring together in the space of the novel dissimilar writing but also to cross boundaries, in order to integrate the Jewish-Sephardic past of her family with present-day Montevideo as well as with the decade of the fifties and the writing of Malamud and Roth. At the same time, the novel is a reflection on women and writing. Leo Masliah, a musician, composer, humorist, dramatist, and narrator is one of those strange and unique cases. Known through his records and recitals in Spain, Argentine and Uruguay, as well as the weekly humorous column he writes for the weekly paper, *Brecha*, his first novel, *Historia transversal de Floreal Menéndez* was so disconcerting to Uruguayans that it was published in Buenos Aires. It consists of a continuous series of variations that have practically no plot or stable characters and in which there is ceaseless estrangement or ridiculing of narrative

clichés. Though it may owe something to Gertrude Stein and George Brassens, it also has links with Uruguayan “eccentrics” like Felisberto Hernández and Mario Levrero.

Poetry which is richer and more interesting as a genre is read by hardly anyone, so that its existence within the general culture is more mythic than real. Yet, in addition to well-known poets such as Amanda Berenguer, Idea Vilariño and Ida Vitale, the list of important poets is long and includes Marossa di Georgio, Salvador Puig, Cristina Peri Rossi as well as younger poets such as Luis Bravo, Jorge Castro Vega, Hugo Fontana and Álvaro Ojeda.¹⁰

Theater, on the other hand and despite certain exceptions and despite the theater festivals at which foreign groups appear, is still preserved by the mothballs of realism. Popular song and national rock music waver between folklore, import substitution and populism. National television is a perfect postmodern reproduction, a simulacrum in which Uruguayan culture hardly exists since everything is already packaged. And cinema? Uruguayan cinema is yet another postmodern product, for it is a signifier without a referent while video production is still in its incipient stage. Only the plastic arts can really be said to be flourishing.

Without going in to more basic questions such as education, the lamentable state of present-day Uruguayan culture is related to the absence of any full-scale discussion that might encourage creativity and imagination. By this I do not refer to trivial polemics about authors but rather to the global reflection on different cultural positions, and a revision of cultural history that goes beyond 1945, beyond 1930 or 1900—in other words I refer to an intellectual discussion that is not taking place. This discussion ought to include the working out of cultural policies and an analysis of the aesthetic and ideological assumptions that underlie the different discourses of Uruguayan society. This discussion would enable us to distinguish merely rhetorical positions from genuine cultural projects, so that we may understand their constitution.

Such discussions, which have only just begun among social scientists, historians and political scientists and within academic circles, must reach a wider audience. These discussions should integrate the new cultural attitudes (often motivated by immediate personal interests) with research. This in turn implies the revision of inherited concepts, narratives and canons that have yet to be subjected to a critical examination.

It is worth recalling that Uruguay has a large history of debates that center on its viability as a nation. Its very position as a “buffer state” has determined not only the social and political history of the country, but also its imaginary repertoire. Discussions of the state of Uruguay at the beginning as well as at the end of the nineteenth century and also in the thirties, the sixties and in the present indicate the difficulty encountered by Uruguayans in defining themselves as a nation. At the present time, when regional integration with the Argentine and Brazil is in the air, nationality has become an even more complex question. The crisis of Uruguayan nationalism is also related to the end of the former dictatorship when the military strongly supported a nationalist model—which they referred to as “orientalidad”—with the result that nationalist discourse is now greeted with suspicion. Thus, the fragmentation of culture together with the lack of any clearly defined dominant register seem both a continuation of a long standing problem and in addition a manifestation of the further weakening of the idea of national culture during the dictatorship.

It is possible that one of the distinctive features of post-modernism in Latin America is precisely the problematization of the concept of the nation. And the difficulty of imagining Uruguay as an integrated community or nation in some Utopian distant future underlies the situation described in this article.

Yet it is also clear that change is inevitable and that Uruguayan culture is in the process of transformation, although it is still difficult to see the direction that it is taking. It is likely that the difficult work of transformation will take until the next millenium, but in the meantime there is a sense of disarray.

The proliferation of discourses and the lack of any clear hegemony cannot be a permanent situation. The feeling of guilt must finally dissipate, though not before leaving a violent mark on national consciousness. There will be other metaphors and myths, other greater or lesser narratives. The question will obviously depend on who tells the story.

NOTES

1. A version of this essay was published as “La cultura uruguaya en la balsa de ‘La Medusa’ ” in *Brecha*, (Montevideo 11 November, 1988).

2. Jonathan Arac in the introduction to the collection he edited, *Postmodernism and Politics*, (University of Minnesota Press:Minneapolis, 1986) p. xii.
3. The most important journals which have published these debates are the *Revista de CLAEH*, a research center associated with the Christian Democratic Party) and *Cuadernos de Marcha*.
4. Hugo Achugar, "El intelectual y estado" in *Cuadernos de Marcha*, 21 (July, 1987).
5. For the debate within the social sciences, see the special issue on Postmodernism of *David y Goliat*, año XVII. Núm. 52 (September, 1987) and the proceedings of the seventh congress of ALAS held in Montevideo in December, 1988.
6. *David y Goliat*, año XVII, Núm. 52 (September, 1987).
7. CONAPRO stands for Comision Nacional Programática. It was an attempt by oppositional parties before the official end of the dictatorship to prepare for re-democratization.
8. L. Weschler, *The New Yorker* (April 3, 1985): p. 85.
9. Among the many "underground" journals are *La oreja cortada*, *Gas*, and *Tranvías y buzones*.
10. Rosario González and Carlos Muñoz, "Arte en la lona. Un cross a la mandíbula," *Cuadernos de Marcha*, (31, May 1988:pp. 75-8).

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