

# Introduction

An arts brochure for almost any major university might appropriately feature a photomontage representing its season of cultural offerings from around the world. The montage might feature a female dancer with an East Indian head, a male Navaho left leg, the right leg of an Afro-American modern dancer, a torso half-covered by a suit and tie, and the other half festooned with eagle feathers with one arm displaying a sacred Tibetan hand gesture, another muscled arm pounding out a rhythm on a Japanese drum, and two more female arms in a lyrical dance pose from India.

Contrast this cultural mixing with the lives of most of the people who have lived on the planet for most of its history. Citizens of the Middle Ages and members of pre-modern tribal societies could live out their years without encountering anyone with another god, a

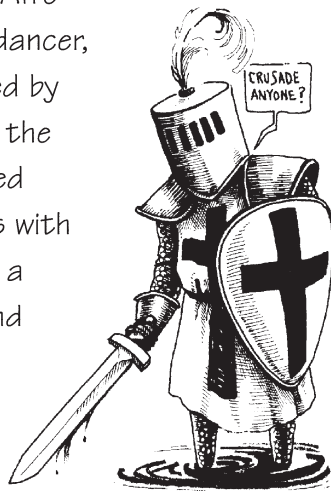
contrary worldview, different folktales, dances or myths. If they should encounter an individual or a society that was different, then the strategy was to conquer it militarily, economically and sexually; to convert it to one's own religion; or to kill it. The very existence of the Other, the very

presence of the Other, posed a threat to the supposed universality of one's own beliefs.

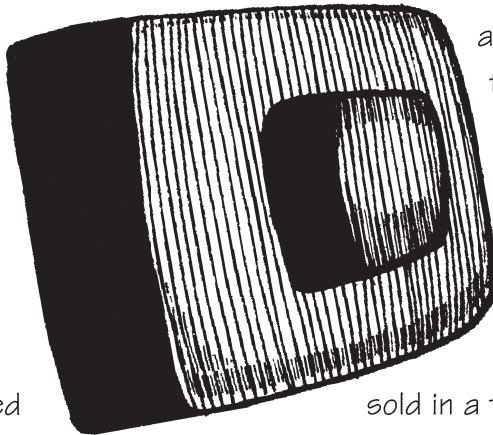
In the Postmodern age, however, it is difficult to get through a day without confronting many different realities.

Simply turn on the TV and you might hear a world music group

singing a blend of Irish love song, Indian raga, heavy-metal anthem, Mongolian Buddhist chant—and all to the tune of peyote drums, gamelans, didgeridoos, panpipes, nose flutes, alpenhorns, sitars and tambourines. And all these sounds may be produced not by the original instrument but electronically, to a danceable reggae



or hip-hop beat, and broadcast worldwide via satellite to millions of viewers—the profits going to save the Brazilian rainforest. In fact, go to a fundamentalist Islamic wedding in an Egyptian village, and the bride, surrounded by stern elders, hooded and veiled so that no intruding male gaze will pollute her—may secretly be listening



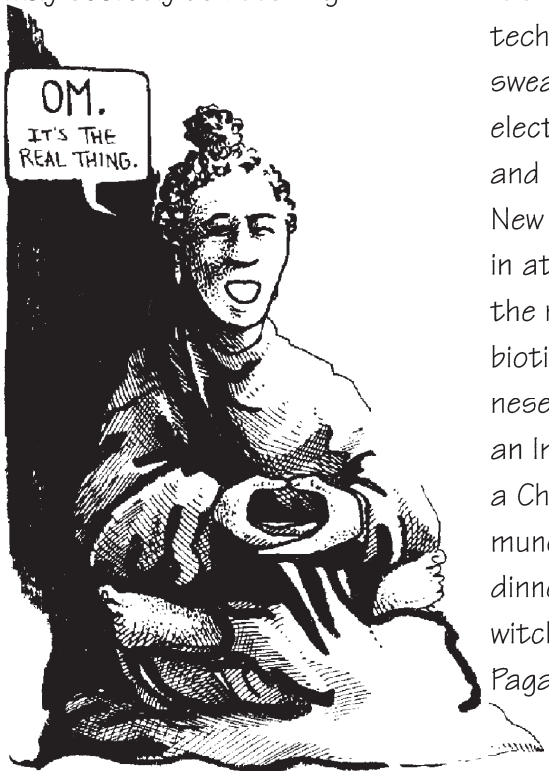
to the concert, beneath the hood, through the earphones of her miniaturized radio. She may be wearing jeans under her

traditional skirt, and have a belly full of Coca-Cola.

Pick up any New Age magazine, and you will find the Mysterious and Unknown

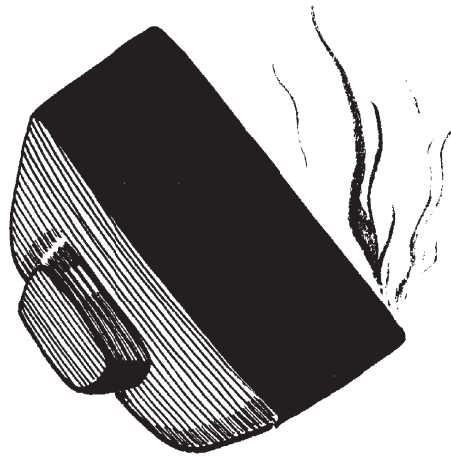
sold in a thousand

forms—psychic channelings of disembodied spirits, Buddhist, Taoist and Hindu meditation techniques, Native American sweat baths, crystals and herbs, electronic meditation machines and exotic potions. Your typical New Ager sees no contradiction in attending a Quaker meeting in the morning, eating a Zen macrobiotic breakfast, sitting for Chinese Taoist meditation, eating an Indian Ayurvedic lunch, doing a Chero-kee sweat before Tai Chi, munching down a soyburger for dinner, dancing in a full-moon witching ceremony with her neo-Pagan Goddess group,

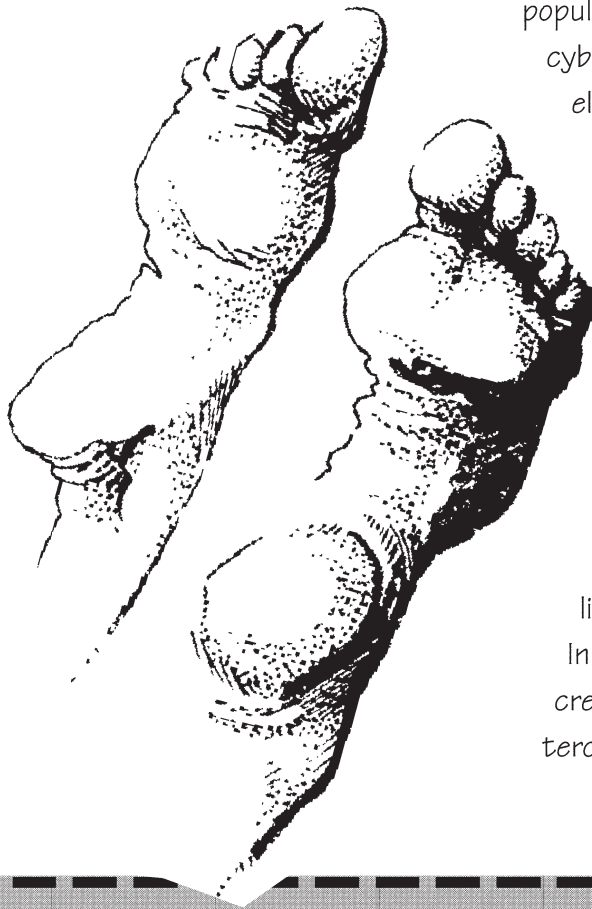


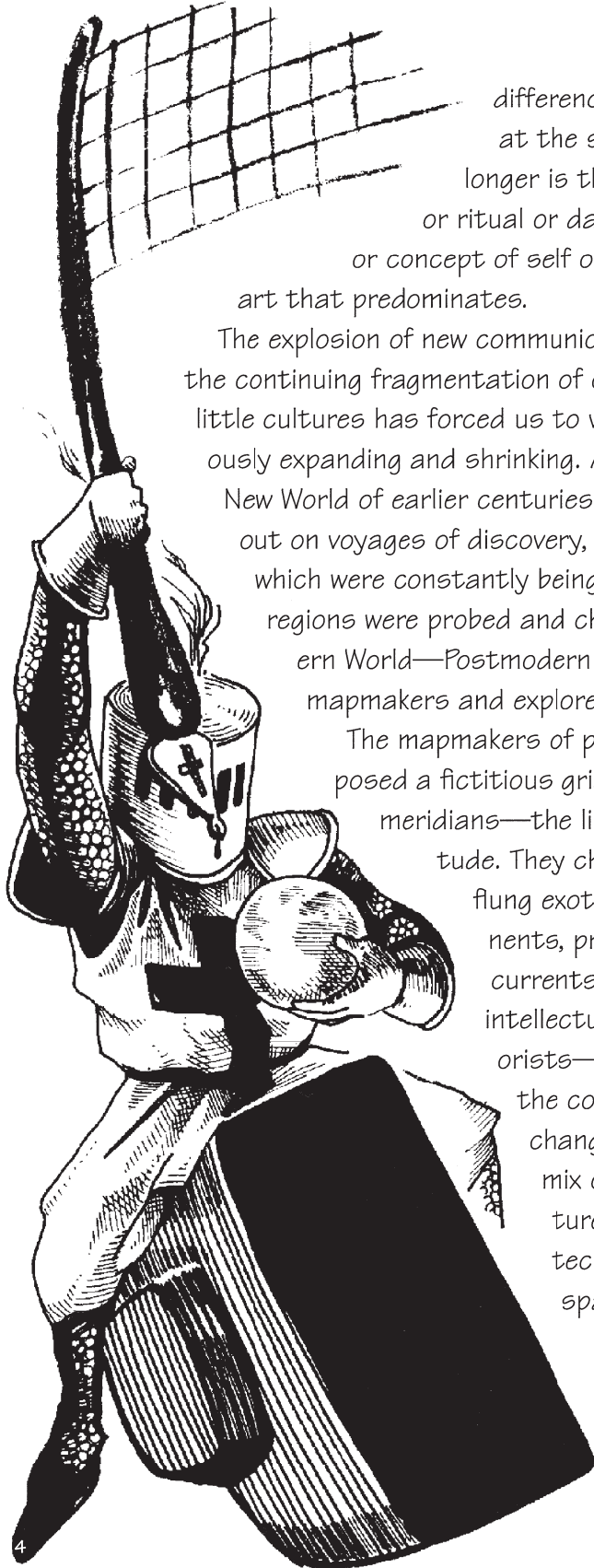
and then coming home  
and making love with her  
New Age boyfriend according  
to Hindu Tantric principles.

All the world's cultures,  
rituals, races, databanks,  
myths and musical motifs  
are intermixing like a smor-  
gasbord in an earthquake.  
And this hodge-podge of  
hybrid images is global,  
flooding the traditional  
mass media, and also Cyber-  
space—a space ever-



blossoming with new universes  
and realities, and which is being  
probed by an ever-expanding  
population of cyberpunks and  
cybershamans who—like  
electronic rats burrowing  
sideways through a  
vast interconnected  
series of electronic  
sewers, cellars, pas-  
sageways, caverns,  
gutters, and tun-  
nels—are capable of  
navigating from cyber-  
site to cyber-site via  
an almost infinitely inter-  
linked catalogue of codes.  
In other words, we live in-  
creasingly in a world of in-  
terconnected differences—



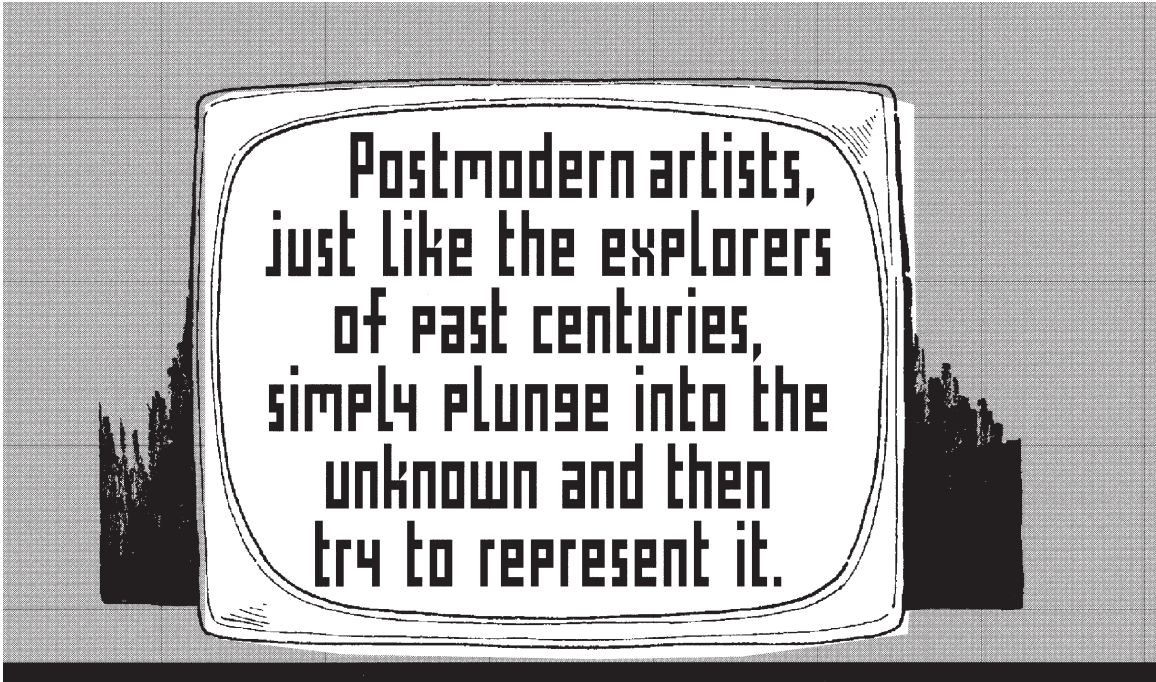


differences amplified and multiplied at the speed of electricity. No longer is there one morality or myth or ritual or dance or dream or philosophy or concept of self or god or culture or style of art that predominates.

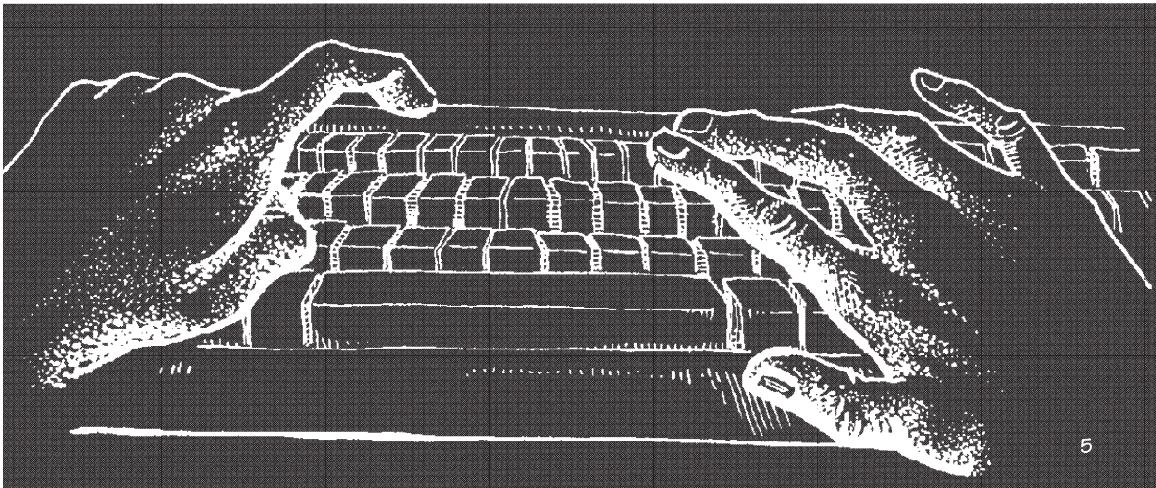
The explosion of new communications technologies and the continuing fragmentation of cultures into thousands of little cultures has forced us to view our world as simultaneously expanding and shrinking. And just as the unexplored New World of earlier centuries had its explorers who set out on voyages of discovery, bringing back new maps, which were constantly being re-drawn as ever new regions were probed and charted, the New Postmodern World—Postmodern Reality—has its mapmakers and explorers.

The mapmakers of past centuries superimposed a fictitious grid upon the globe—the meridians—the lines of latitude and longitude. They charted narrow straits, far-flung exotic archipelagos, dark continents, prevailing winds, waves and currents. Similarly, Postmodern intellectuals—philosophers and theorists—have attempted to map the contours of our rapidly changing Postmodern world—its mix of identities, realities, cultures, races, gender roles, technologies, economies, cyberspaces, mediascapes.

But not everyone thinks intellectually about all the changes that are taking place.



These Postmodern artists or architects simply take note of the new mix of messages, symbols, cultures and media, and then create a video, song, painting or building that reflects the Postmodern condition. We will be exploring the thoughts of some of these “mapmakers” and “explorers,” these Postmodern intellectuals and artists, in the pages that follow.



# Post-modernese

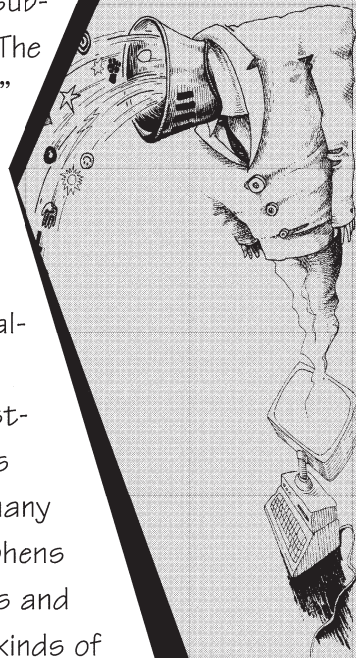
**Q** But wait a minute! If Post-modern thinkers have some really new ideas mapping the contours of our times, why haven't I heard of these ideas before?

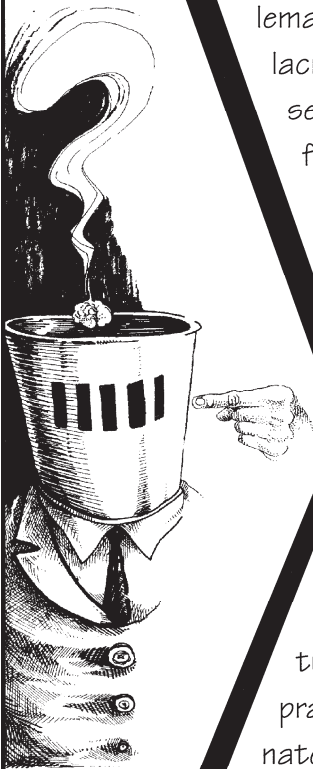
**A** A major reason is that Post-modernese is such a difficult language to understand—and most books on Postmodernism are written in this particularly obscure tongue.

For instance—let's suppose you live in the 1970s, and you want to say "The way white guys treat Third World women as sex objects is shallow and disgusting."

The first thing you have to do to translate it into Postmodernese is to make the sentence stop making sense. You do this by substituting mysterious Postmodern buzzwords or phrases for ordinary words that do make sense. For instance "white guys" can profitably be replaced by the phrase "phallogocratic and panoptic (in the Foucaultian sense) Dead-White-

Male subject-positions." This is because, in Postmodernese, guys no longer exist. They have become "subject-positions." The same goes for women. Therefore the phrase "Third World women" needs to be gussified up to "post-colonial female subject-positions." The phrase "the way" could properly be rendered as "the hegemonic (mis)representation and de/valorization of." As you can see, Post-modernese relies upon using as many slashes and hyphens and parentheses and whatever other kinds of marks your computer can make as possible. Thus the word "shallow" should correctly be rendered as "a textually (re)inscribed praxis of pre-disseminated, (counter) subversive 'depthlessness.'"





To be perfectly correct, your final translation should sound something like this: “The hegemonic (mis)representation and de/valorization of the always-already multi-(de)/gendered plurivocalities and (de)centered de/constructed and dialogically problematized ludic simulacra of absent/present postcolonial female subject-positions, by hypereroticized and orientalized phallocratic and panoptic (in the Foucaultian sense) Dead-White-Male subject-position discourse, is a textually (re)inscribed praxis of pre-disseminated, (counter)subversive depthlessness.”

**Q** What!?!?

**A** And if anyone asks you what all that means, you just behold them with a gaze of

infinite bewilderment. Then you look them in the eye, compassionately, and tell them that the plurivocal ambiguities of (non)meaning inherent in their question obviously subvert the possibility of your delivering to them the kind of cheap and low-down phallocratic, and logocentric patriarchal hogwallow of an answer which they are capable of understanding.

**Q** Well I’m not so sure I understand what Postmodernism is. And is it POSTmodernISM, postMODERNism, PoStmOdErNism, post-modernism or Postmodernism?

**A** It has been written in all those ways. Postmodernism—as the “post” preface implies, is something that follows modernism. However, people who think about such things as Postmodernism don’t agree whether Postmodernism is a break from modernism or a continuation of modernism—or both. In fact, they don’t even agree as to what modernism is, much less Postmodernism.

# What Is Modernism?



**Q** Well, what is modernism?

**A** Modernism is a blanket term for an explosion of new styles and trends in the arts in the first half of the 20th century. If the modern era had a central image—it was that of a kind of non-image—a Void—and if the era had a quotation that summed it all up, it was Irish poet William Butler Yeats’s lines:

Things fall apart; the  
centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed  
upon the world.

**Q** But what things fell apart in the modern era? What center could not hold?

**A** What fell apart in the modern era were the values of the 18th century, the Age of Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason. Probably the main value of the age, besides reason, was the idea of progress.