> situation of face-to-face interaction. In conditions of modernity ...
> locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social
> influences quite distant from them. What structures the locale is not
> simply that which is present on the scene; the 'visible form' of the
> locale conceals the distanced relations which determine its nature.
> (Giddens, 1990, p.18)

Places remain fixed; they are where we have 'roots'. Yet space can be
'crossed' in the twinkling of an eye — by jet, fax or satellite. Harvey
calls this 'the annihilation of space through time' (1989, p.205).

4.2 TOWARDS THE GLOBAL POST-MODERN?

Some theorists argue that the general effect of these globalizing
processes has been to weaken or undermine national forms of cultural
identity. They argue that there is evidence of a loosening of strong
identifications with the national culture, and a strengthening of other
cultural ties and allegiances, 'above' and 'below' the level of the nation-
state. National identities remain strong, especially with respect to such
things as legal and citizenship rights, but local, regional and community
identities have become more significant. Above the level of the national
culture, 'global' identifications begin to displace, and sometimes over-
ride, national ones.

Some cultural theorists argue that the trend towards greater global
interdependence is leading to the break-down of *all* strong cultural
identities and is producing that fragmentation of cultural codes, that
multiplicity of styles, emphasis on the ephemeral, the fleeting, the
impermanent, and on difference and cultural pluralism which Kenneth
Thompson described in Chapter 5, but on a global scale — what we
might call *the global post-modern*. Cultural flows and global
consumerism between nations create the possibilities of 'shared
identities' — as 'customers' for the same goods, 'clients' for the same
services, 'audiences' for the same messages and images — between
people who are far removed from one another in time and space. As
national cultures become more exposed to outside influences it is
difficult to preserve cultural identities intact, or to prevent them from
becoming weakened through cultural bombardment and infiltration.

People in small, apparently remote villages in poor, 'Third World'
countries can receive in the privacy of their homes the messages and
images of the rich, consumer cultures of the West, purveyed through TV
sets or the transistor radio, which bind them into the 'global village' of
the new communications networks. Jeans and trainers — the 'uniform'
of the young in Western youth culture — are as ubiquitous in South-
East Asia as in Europe or the US, not only because of the growth of the
world-wide marketing of the youth consumer image, but because they
are often actually produced in Taiwan or Hong Kong or South Korea for
the New York, Los Angeles, London or Rome high-street shop. It is hard
to think of 'Indian cooking' as something distinctive of the ethnic

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traditions of the Asian sub-continent when there is an Indian restaurant in the centre of every city and town in Britain.

The more social life becomes mediated by the global marketing of styles, places and images, by international travel, and by globally networked media images and communications systems, the more *identities* become detached — disembedded — from specific times, places, histories, and traditions, and appear 'free-floating'. We are confronted by a range of different identities, each appealing to us, or rather to different parts of ourselves, from which it seems possible to choose. It is the spread of consumerism, whether as reality or dream, which has contributed to this 'cultural supermarket' effect. Within the discourse of global consumerism, differences and cultural distinctions which hitherto defined *identity* become reducible to a sort of international *lingua franca* or global currency into which all specific traditions and distinct identities can be translated. This phenomenon is known as 'cultural homogenization'.

ACTIVITY 1   You should now read **Reading A, 'Global culture'**, by Kevin Robins, which you will find at the end of this chapter. As you read, note:
- First, the account Robins offers of trends towards 'global standardization';
- Then, the turn in the argument: 'global standardization' also involves the 'marketing' of difference;
- Finally, what Robins then says about the growth of a new global–local nexus.