The promise — and the specter — of globalization has dominated efforts to understand human social environments for more than a half-century. Concepts such as modernization, the logic of industrialization, and socioeconomic development have shaped hopes for a just future and fears of cultural hegemony and neocolonialism. The recognition that “underdevelopment” is a process in itself — and the attendant image of a world divided between center and periphery — sounded a wakeup call about the dark side of global capitalism more than thirty years ago. In retrospect, many of those ideas seem prescient. The metropolis-periphery distinction was largely metaphor when articulated in the 1960s. It has become part of everyday existence in the twenty-first century.

These questions about the nature of globalization have taken on new immediacy in recent decades. Governments have moved quickly to build a political infrastructure to support global corporations, global media, and the seamless movement of goods and money to any part of the world. In the process, the gap between the highly mobile members of a world managerial and ownership class and the remainder of the world population has grown into a chasm.

However, the nature of globalization remains elusive in many ways, and certain key questions have taken on even greater urgency. Is the world splitting into a globalized sector surrounded by pockets of tradition — places where people have been excluded from the process of globalization? Or is globalization like “underdevelopment” — a process that inexorably links the marginalized with people at the industrial center and shapes the lives of both? These questions go to the heart of very basic concepts such as tradition and locality, and lie at the center of efforts to understand how people live in their physical environments.

This collection of images argues for the idea that globalization is a process that involves people at the margins as deeply as the owners and managers of world capital. Globalization produces a relationship between people and social institutions that has a similar structure throughout the world. This structural similarity does not imply homogenization of culture or destruction of tradition. The production of distinctions between traditional and modern or local and global involves a similar process everywhere, but specific cultural products have distinctive local features. The commonality among local or traditional segments of society lies in the system of social relations that produces distinctions between
global and local. It is a feature of the structural relationship of the marginalized to each other and to the global social and political system that has defined their place at the margins.

This emerges particularly vividly in the way people live within the built environment. Elements of local design and style may vary, but the effects of the built environment on social life — and the ways people shape the built environment through their social activities — display a common underlying structure. The purpose of this collection of photographs is to highlight that common structure. The images

**Image 1** Tacos Chabelita, Los Angeles, 1997.

Eating on the street is a basic part of everyday life for people around the globe. The highly mobile, dispersed structure of Los Angeles has produced taco stands on wheels — a modernized version of the traditional market cart, seen here on the streets of East Los Angeles.

**Image 2** Hawker center, Singapore, 2000.

In Singapore, central planning has moved vendors into organized “hawker centers” where Malay, Chinese and Indian food stands reflect the ethnic makeup of the city. This scene in a typical Singapore hawker center shows food stalls serving Malay and local “South Indian” food, a fusion of Indian and Malay Islamic cuisine distinctive to the region, that also reflects Singapore’s cultural diversity.
capture the physical and social settings where people carry out their everyday existence in cities across the globe. These images are not conventional photojournalism; the objective of the collection is analytical rather than documentary. The physical environment carries as much weight as the people within the photographs, and the two are inseparable. The images do not attempt to describe the ways that people live, rather to challenge the viewer to understand the built environment as a socio-cultural byproduct that also acts to shape social life. In the twenty-first century, this also is an understanding of globalization in its most basic form.
A vendor near the Black Nazarene Church in old Manila sells religious objects. Like street vendors in Hanoi, Mexico City, and Hong Kong, she lives by helping ordinary people meet basic material and spiritual needs.

Electrical vendor, Hong Kong, 2001. Street stalls continue to survive in the margins of Hong Kong society. They provide a living for people who lack the skills or resources to compete in Hong Kong's modern economy, as indicated by this electrical vendor in the city's central district.
Aberdeen Street, Hong Kong, 2001.

The Aberdeen market in Hong Kong lacks the ethnic diversity of street markets in London or Paris, but it has become an intersection of generations instead. Street selling clusters around the elderly people who favor the walkable areas of a neighborhood west of the skyscraper district of Central Hong Kong, one of the oldest local communities.

Image 7 Food vendor, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, China, 2004.

Food sellers in China are more likely to push their mobile kitchens than drive them, like the taco vendor in Los Angeles. A sweet potato vendor is shown in the streets of Guangzhou.


A street stall selling clothing is improvised on the hood of a car in Montmartre, Paris. African migrants in Paris create an informal market on the streets to buy and sell clothing, music, and daily necessities.

Image 9 Aberdeen Street, Hong Kong, 2001.

The Aberdeen market in Hong Kong lacks the ethnic diversity of street markets in London or Paris, but it has become an intersection of generations instead. Street selling clusters around the elderly people who favor the walkable areas of a neighborhood west of the skyscraper district of Central Hong Kong, one of the oldest local communities.
REFERENCE NOTES

The images in this essay were part of the photographic installation, "Urban Funk," held at the Goethe Institute Gallery, Hong Kong, in September 2003. The installation was supported by a grant from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council. Travel to world cities represented in it and in this visual essay was funded by a research grant from the University of Hong Kong.