

**BOOK REVIEWS****Act Locally, Ruin Globally?***Tom Hertweck***Peter Dauvergne, *The Shadows of Consumption: Consequences for the Global Environment*, MIT Press, 2008.**

Long-concerned with the web of relations between environmentalism and globalization, Peter Dauvergne, Professor of Political Science and Canada Research Chair in Global Environmental Politics at the University of British Columbia, revisits a metaphor from his first book, the Sprout Award-winning *Shadows in the Forest* (1997), for the title of his new *Shadows of Consumption*. As with his previous work, the “shadow” here is a metaphor for the systemic effects of consumer activities on environmental policies and practices, complicated by movements of trade in the globalized economy. Here also, however, in this insightful and imminently useful work, Dauvergne expands his focus from the timber economies in Southeast Asia to a variety of products that touch points around the world.

The book undertakes five case studies—automobiles, leaded gasoline, refrigerators, beef, and Canadian seal hunting—to illustrate the ways in which commodity consumption both causes and alleviates environmental problems. However, because of the complexity of interactions between globalized environmentalism and postmodern economics, the stories are never simply about more of this and less of that; changes *here* bring about new and different problems somewhere *else*. In the case of automobiles, Dauvergne carefully explains how the once innocuous plaything of the rich became by industry design a banal but absolutely necessary consumer good, as well as one of the most significant sources of environmental degradation. In the case of leaded gasoline, we see the orchestrated efforts of industry to squelch rumblings of tetraethyl lead’s health risks, a campaign whose effects could only be undone by insistent researchers and consumer attitudes that created the market for unleaded alternatives. In the case of refrigerators, the phase-out of CFCs required the consumption of newer, more efficient units, which in turn spurred global increases in consumption of refrigerators as the operating costs simultaneously decreased. In the case of beef, concerted efforts on the part of that industry over the past century to increase people’s desire for meat have had disastrous environmental effects in countries with the heaviest production. Finally, in the case of the Canadian seal hunt, Dauvergne describes the ways in which activists’ protests have had effects on markets by nearly closing off seal hunts in the 1970s and 1980s, only to see them resurge in the 1990s as a result of better organized government interference in the global sealskin market.

In each case the environmental problems seem to shift even as they are “solved.” Older cars do not simply disappear, but are instead sold abroad. Nations developing their own petroleum resources have no market impetus to spend on phasing out leaded gasoline. Developing nations haven’t the economic infrastructure to convert or properly scrap CFC-laden refrigeration units in order to purchase new ones. More efficient beef production methods continue to spur consumption, even though such consumption has been shown to have substantial health effects. And, even as seal pelt markets in Europe and the U.S. disappear, new markets in Russia and China seem insatiable.

To be sure, Dauvergne is no booster of the market as the sole mechanism through which we might enact global environmental change. Indeed, his studies are complicated stories about products that often involve industry's trying mightily to derail change (automobiles, lead, and seal skins), as often, even, as industry attempts to create new, more supposedly environmentally sound markets (CFCs, beef, and, again, automobiles). The central investigative aspect of this book is the relationship between global economic practices and their effects on the environment seen at the macro-level. While each highlights certain aspects of consumer, activist, or market effects in working for environmental change, the central point these studies drive home is that acting locally does not—and likely could not—serve to address global issues, and that without deep-rooted systemic change, fixing these problems is something of a zero-sum game that shifts around environmental degradation without minimizing it absolutely. In fact, as Dauvergne argues, total detrimental environmental effects often *increase*, simply accumulating in certain geographic regions to which we pay little attention. He usefully repeats this point: Though particular negative environmental problems may be diminished in a given locale or product area (the per-unit effects), the shadow of consumption simply shifts elsewhere and endangers others—more often than not already overburdened social groups or ecological systems.

His most compelling study is about refrigerators, as it combines a number of the most pressing elements of economic systems and their natural environment. These include consumer-driven market forces as the effects of ozone depletion became public; industrial infrastructure to make the changes, and a readily available CFC alternative; foreign aid for developing nations to spur changes where it wasn't economically feasible; and, the darkest shadow of all, the simultaneous proliferation of newer, more efficient refrigerators, which fuel even more consumerism as people now buy multiple refrigerators and freezers (where once they may have bought none at all) because of low purchase and operating costs.

The closing chapter—a relatively short collection of “musings” [p. 219] on what is to be done—opens a dialogue on the ways in which we might shorten the shadows of consumption sketched in these case studies. For those who have spent a good deal of time wrestling with issues of consumerism and environmental justice, most of these suggestions are predictable: consume less, foster equitable trade, make our choices based on precaution, and normalize international environmental standards. Even so, the reminders provided here gain momentum precisely because of the care Dauvergne has put into crafting his commodity narratives.

Some may argue that because this study provides no specific policy recommendations, and instead outlines broad avenues of action, there is little use within it. The reality here is far from this. Dauvergne's biggest asset at work is his ability to carefully process a mass of information about the effects of globalization and the environment and craft narratives that highlight the tension between them. Dauvergne's isn't a highly theoretical work, but is instead more concerned with marshaling information into direct and well-researched case histories that make his point with a maximum of clarity. A text that should be read by anyone with a concern for the ways in which globalization collides and grates against environmental concern, *The Shadows of Consumption* is an important, lucid book that will engage the ways in which we—both as scholars and consumers—interact with the world.