Consumption

Life is a concentration of energy that temporarily withstands the flow of entropy. The higher the concentration, the more alive it can be. In the evolution of the human species, there came a time when we learned to concentrate energy beyond the confines of our own bodies. When we figured out how to concentrate the heat energy available from hydrocarbon fuels in a cylinder to push a piston, we became exponentially more alive.

Every dime we spend buys energy, resources, and pollution. The size of the economy is the rate at which we are consuming the planet. Throughout the media and the social consciousness there is an almost universal unquestioned assumption that economic growth is good. The reality is that unchecked growth is a suicidal addiction for this civilization.

Picking up the timeline around two centuries ago;

As the industrial revolution exploded around the world, pollution became a problem, but it was local. For the next hundred years or so, advances in technology increased our ability to produce thousands of times as much stuff to ease the burdens of life and we put up with the pollution. There was still plenty of room out back to take a dump. Cleanup was an afterthought when it started to interfere in too many lives, and it was local.

The next fifty years gave us the chemical revolution and the communication revolution, which multiplied the complexity of product production manyfold again. In combination with a peak in global population growth rate and a steadily decreasing death rate, this brought on our first taste of global pollution, but it was generally seen as just a nuisance.

The cyber revolution has given us a whole new multiplication of the poisonous byproducts of production and consumption that we have to deal with, and for the first time there's no more room out back to take a dump. Just about every place is someone's back yard.

Even though we're becoming increasingly aware of the dangers of the millions of different chemicals we're pouring into our environment, all our advances in technological innovation for cleanliness and efficiency aren't even coming close to keeping up with the environmental consequences of our desire to consume. Increasing efficiency without decreasing consumption gets us nowhere. The problem isn't efficiency. The problem is our hardcore addiction to energy. Every increase in efficiency just lets us consume more. All forms of consumption involve pollution of some sort. Today, levels of greenhouse gasses and particulate smog are still increasing, and the number and volume of poisons in our air and water are increasing exponentially.

The more you eat, the more you shit. We'll either discipline our consumption, or we'll choke on our shit.

If you research the total effects of the production, consumption, and disposal of everything you buy for even a day and spread it over the surface of the earth multiplied by a few billion, what does it look like?

Not just the visible stuff like the layer of smog that's clearly visible from space, but the knowledge of the many thousands of different chemicals that it's composed of.

Not just the flood in Los Angeles, but the knowledge of what's in the huge toxic plume as the entire LA basin is washed and flushed into the sea. The rubber worn off millions of tires. The antifreeze and oil dripping from many thousands of cars. The herbicides and pesticides sprayed around a million houses. The residue and spills of the thousands of chemicals used by the thousands of factories around the valley. The layer of particulate smog that settles on everything in the valley.

Not just the product sitting on the shelf, but the chunk of central Canada that was turned to wasteland for the oil it took to get it and you to the store, multiplied by fifty million.

Not just the electricity, but the power plant that produced it. Visualize the energy and pollution that it takes to build and maintain a coal fired facility, and all the products of combustion that it spews out. The average human burns about 5 pounds of coal a day. Are you an average human? Visualize 180,000 railcars a day rolling to the worlds coal fired power plants. Visualize 1,200 miles of coal train rolling continuously at fifty miles an hour.

Visualize a nuclear power plant and what it's likely to look like in a few hundred years. Surveying state of the art technology for the disposal of a nuclear power plant, it seems likely that many of our nuclear reactors will end up spilling their guts one way or another as they become old and derelict.

Not just the fuel we put in our cars, but the products of combustion that come out the other end. Stick your nose in it for just a second and see what it smells like. What you can actually smell is only the smaller and less dangerous portion of what's coming out of the pipe. Multiply that by 3,600 an hour to visualize the size of your plume. Multiply that by 1,000,000,000 to visualize the global plume. Is it decomposing or is it piling up?

One fillup at the gas station can do more work than a strong healthy human body can do in several years. This is not, however, a measure of accomplishment, it's just a measure of work done. Around town, a bicycle would get us there almost as fast, sometimes faster, but the car has to move twenty times as much weight and push many times as much air as a bicycle. The car also consumes about eighty times more energy and resources in its production, and produces hundreds of times more pollution.

What will happen to the billions of old batteries as we convert to electric cars?

When you put on your makeup, do you visualize the energy, resources, and pollution it took to make it? It's mostly just a fad like bustles and corsets and pantyhose. It's just a money scam that women have been conned into. The men I know think that painted eyebrows and false eyelashes are a tacky distraction. It's a

shame to see a beautiful woman hidden behind a mask of tacky plastic. When done with discretion, makeup can enhance beauty, but it can't create it. Beauty comes from the inside.

If you buy a cheap plastic toy for your kid, do you visualize the environmental costs our children will have to deal with because of the billions and billions of cheap plastic toys we've bought for our kids? Do you think about what your child will learn from the toy?

Looking ahead a few hundred years, what will we do when most of our resources are homogenized, polluted, and useless in the landfill?

In everything you consume, visualize the results of your consumption. Visualize the results of everything you consume multiplied by millions and billions, and compare that to the size of the earth.

The general populace is awash in a sea of advertising conning them into consuming vast amounts of energy, resources and the subsequent pollution, buying toys to play with for a moment, then throw in the landfill or spend more energy recycling.

The energy industry advertises with the phrase "The energy we need". It's one of the biggest lies the community ever bought. It's mostly just the energy we want. I want the energy and vitality that cocaine brings, but I know that, in the long run, it will bring misery and an early death, so I look for other ways to get energy and vitality or I do without. On a larger scale we're just starting to become aware of the consequences of this civilization's energy addiction. We don't need to stop wanting, but we sure need to change what we want.

Inherent in the nature of an addiction are the difficulties associated with quitting. When you're stuck in a rut, it's much easier to stay in the rut. Unfortunately the rut we're in is headed for extinction. It's going to take the very hard and painful efforts of billions of people to climb out of this rut. Until a sufficient percentage of humanity become sufficiently aware of where capitalism is taking us to be motivated enough to make the required effort, it ain't gonna happen. So learn and teach and create a new way. Set aside your toys for a while and get to work. Time is short.

Don't give me any cowardly, fatalistic bullshit about how it's too late. Get your ass in gear. It's way too late to hit the brakes, so grab the wheel and find another way. It's not about whether the shit's gonna hit the fan; it's about what to do with the fertilizer on the other side.