

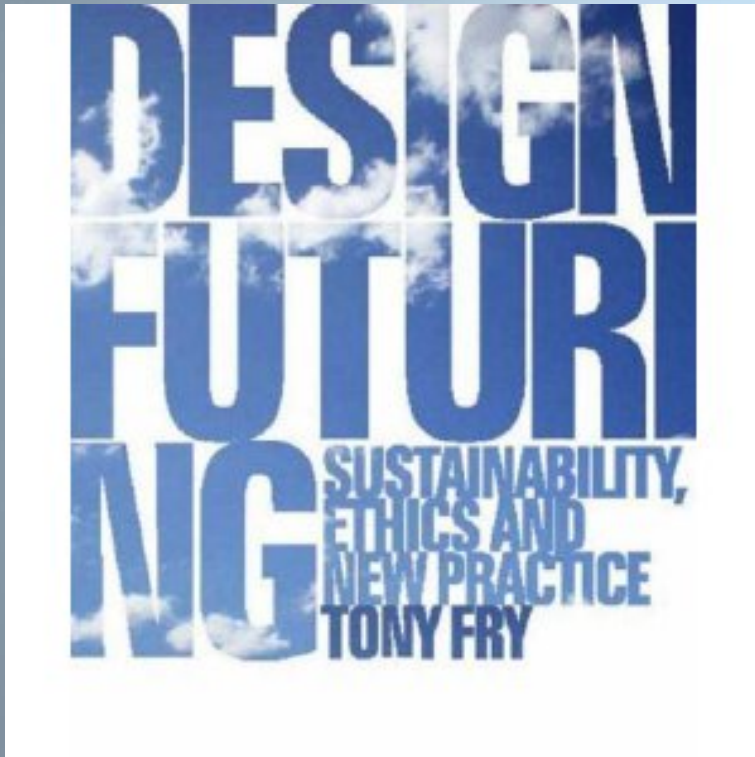


SLOW DOWN, YOU MOVE TOO FAST: the potential for ending Britain's throwaway culture

Tim Cooper
Professor of Sustainable Design and Consumption
Nottingham Trent University

MADE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW? London, 7th September 2010

DESIGNING THE FUTURE?



"Reconceptualise design from a service industry concentrating on an end product to one focussing on process, large scale thinking and transformative acts."

*Tony Fry,
Design consultant*

HOW MUCH CONSUMPTION?



"At face value UK emissions look like they have decreased 15% or 16% since 1990.

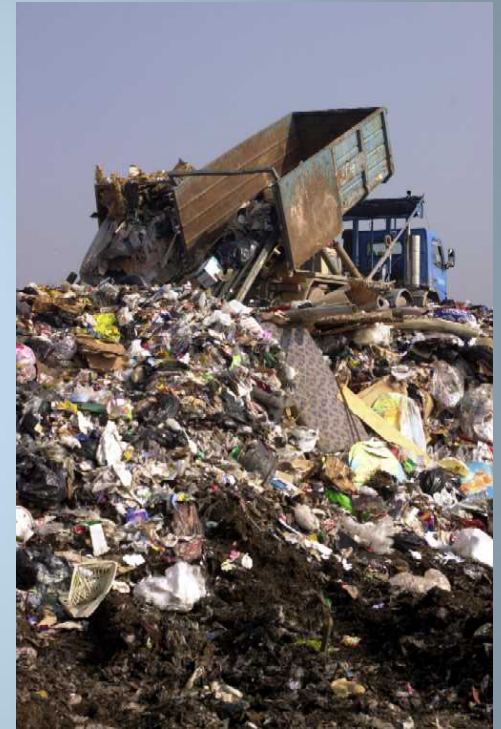
But if you take in carbon embedded in our imports, our emissions have gone up about 12%. We've got to be more open about this."

*Bob Watson,
Government Chief Scientist*

SOURCES OF EXCESSIVE CARBON EMISSIONS...



THE THROWAWAY SOCIETY



The average person in the UK consumes resources and emits CO₂ as if we had three planets to support us.

WWF

AND SOME PEOPLE WANT US TO CONSUME MORE...

BBC NEWS

[WATCH LIVE](#) BBC News 24

Last Updated: Wednesday, 12 March 2008, 14:24 GMT

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Grim prospect for economic growth

By Steve Schifferes
Economics reporter, BBC News

The UK economy is facing its biggest slowdown since Labour came to power - and the biggest rise in public borrowing, the chancellor has said.

Chancellor Alistair Darling warned that economic growth in 2008 and 2009 would be slower than the government expected.

He cut his growth forecast for 2008 to 1.75%-2.25%, well below the 2.5%-3% predicted in last year's Budget.

And he warned public borrowing would rise to £43bn next year, rather than falling to £36bn as he had hoped.

But the chancellor was more optimistic than most independent forecasters for both this year and especially in 2009, when he predicts growth will return to its long-term average of 2.25% to 2.75%.

READ THE BUDGET IN FULL

[Budget statement](#) [112KB]

[Complete report](#) [4.06MB]

Most computers will open this document automatically, but you may need Adobe Reader

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“ If growth is slower than the Treasury projects, then borrowing could easily rise above these levels ”

John Hawksworth,
PricewaterhouseCoopers

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CRISIS, WHAT CRISIS?



Today's problem is fast materials throughput in a 'linear economy' – economic growth is evidently still the primary goal in politicians' minds

WHAT SOLUTION FOR AN UNSUSTAINABLE ECONOMY?

More throughput!



Vehicle scrappage scheme - stimulate car production through subsidies for consumers replacing vehicles over 10 years old

...AND HOW SUSTAINABLE WAS IT?

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6 September 2010 Last updated at 09:54



UK car sales suffer sharp decline

New car sales fell sharply in August for the second consecutive month, figures from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders have shown.

August saw 55,305 new cars registered - down 17.5% compared with August 2009, the SMMT said.

The industry body warned that the market would remain tough for the rest of the year.

However it reiterated that it expected more than two million new cars to be sold in 2010.

That would be a 1.2% increase on 2009.

Scrappage impact



PA

The end of the scrappage scheme meant a sales fall was expected

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NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN?

- “If what had filled the consumer market yesterday could only be made obsolete today, that whole market would be again available tomorrow.” Paul Mazur, 1928
- “People would turn in their used and obsolete goods to certain government agencies.” *Ending the Depression through Planned Obsolescence*, Bernard London, 1932

EFFICIENCY AS THE SOLUTION?

"Resource productivity will not, on its own, deliver the desired reconciliation between the pursuit of economic growth and the imperative of learning to live within the Earth's biophysical constraints and carrying capacities."

Redefining Prosperity,

Sustainable Development Commission, 2003

WHERE DO EFFICIENCY SAVINGS END UP?

- Rebounding back into more stuff ...

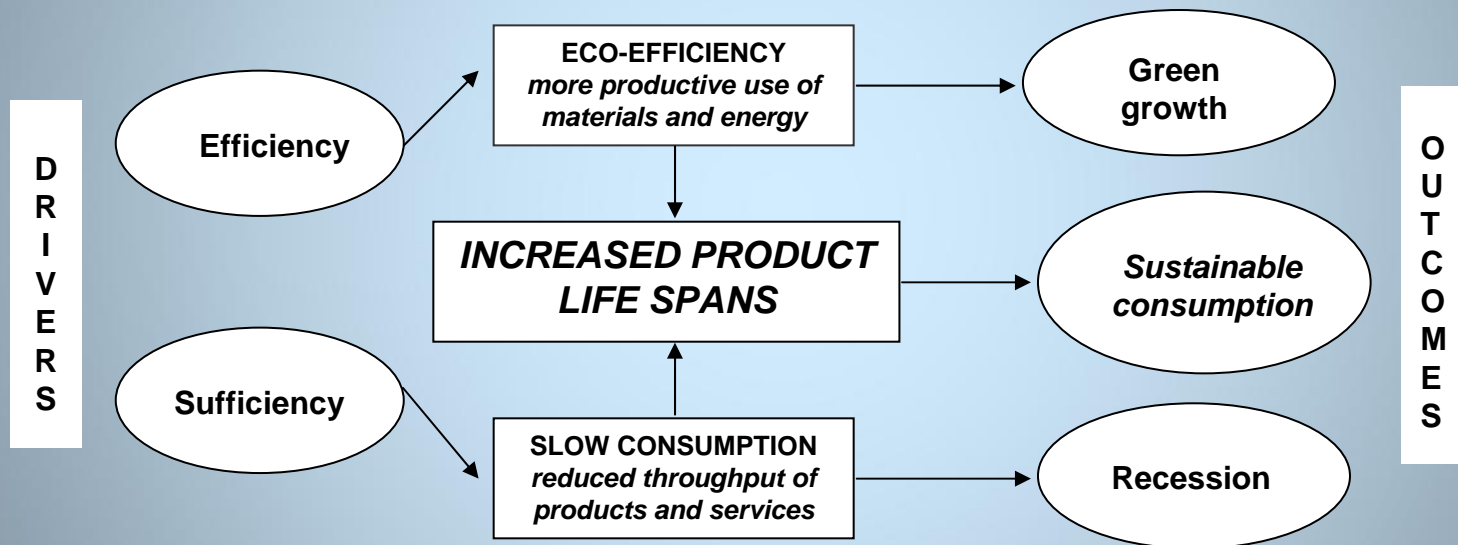


BETTER WASTE MANAGEMENT?

Recycling

- reduces landfill impacts
- enables waste to be re-envisioned as a resource but
- has negative environmental impacts (and is merely a means, not an end)
- provides “an instant environmental excuse for obsolescence” (Tim Hunkin)

LONGEVITY: A MISSING LINK



Tim Cooper, *Longer Lasting Products* (Gower, 2010)

PRODUCT LIFE-SPANS

- Broad consensus of public concern - 'things don't last...', though little firm data
- Producers blamed for 'planned' obsolescence ... but past research has tended to focus on consumers' 'disposal behaviour'
- Vague sense of a systemic problem – 'throwaway society' cliché

THE MANY FACES OF OBSOLESCENCE

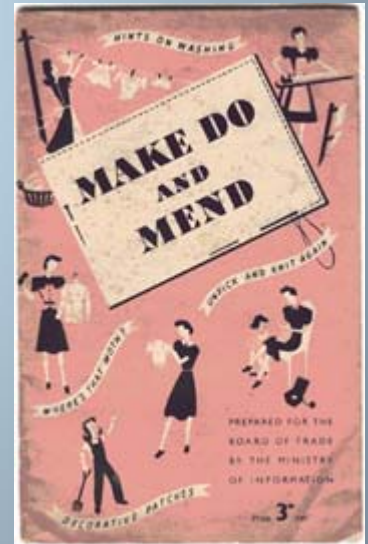
- Technological (lost functionality)
 - How far can upgradeability be taken?
- Economic (not worth maintaining)
 - Repair or replacement?
- Psychological (lost desire / attachment)
 - Can we love *all* of our products?
- Socio-cultural (peer group pressure)
 - Are we individualists or followers?

DESIGNING FOR LONGEVITY

- Product level - design for physical durability
 - Robustness
- Personal level - design for emotional durability
 - Product attachment
- Social level - designing 'system innovation'
 - Changing the world behind the product

DURABLES / SEMI-DURABLES

- Could shoppers have better information about product life spans?
- Can repair and maintenance ever be revived?



'DURABLES' SUBJECT TO FASHION

- Do my eyes look good in these?



- Is there a future for fast fashion?



LOW QUALITY PRODUCTS

- Can anything be too cheap?



DISPOSABLES

- Time to end consumer sovereignty?



CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE ACADEMY

- Identify consumers' influences upon product life spans (Evans) and products that 'defy' obsolescence? (Park)
- Design products that have 'emotional durability' (Chapman, Mugge) and discourage replacement through flexible design (Van Nes)
- Create a functional service economy focused on selling performance (Stahel)

DESIGNING FOR LONGEVITY

- Design for
 - An appropriate life span
 - Reliability
 - Potential upgrading
 - Adaptability
 - Ease of maintenance
 - Ease of repair
 - Reuse
 - Remanufacture / reconditioning



**We wear out our clothes
before you buy them**

look behind the label



Source: Vezzoli and Manzini

EXTENDING LIFE SPANS

- Up to 31% of discarded bulky goods (furniture, appliances) have reuse potential but only 15% are reused
- 86% of bulky waste is discarded using routes focused on recycling and disposal cf. reuse (Curran, 2010)
- Reuse organisations lack access to local authority waste streams
- Need for far more separation and diversion e.g. more reuse bays in HWRCs

RETHINKING / TRANSFORMING

- Rethink our personal time frame for responsibility – the 'Long Now'
 - 'the period in which people feel they live and act and have responsibility' (Stewart Brand)
- Promote social transformation - a 'culture of permanence'
 - 'a way of life that can endure through countless generations' (Alan Durning)