

READINGS

[Proposal]

VIVOLEUM

From “Lifelines, Lifetimes, and Timelines: Hoisting Ourselves Up the Fossil Chain,” a presentation delivered June 14 at GO-EXPO, an oil-industry conference held in Calgary, Alberta, by “Shepard K. Wolff” and “Florian Osenberg,” impostors posing as officials working for the U.S. National Petroleum Council and ExxonMobil’s alternative-energy program. “Wolff” and “Osenberg” are members of the Yes Men, an activist group based in Brooklyn. After the presentation, both men were issued tickets for trespassing. Lee Raymond retired as CEO of ExxonMobil in 2005 and now chairs the NPC.

SHEPARD K. WOLFF: Ladies and gentlemen, I’m very sorry Lee Raymond couldn’t make it today. He’s in Washington, discussing a landmark National Petroleum Council study with President Bush before he announces the study’s conclusions, complete with presidential approval, later today. But I am very pleased to be able to give you a sneak preview of that study, which shows that the United States and Canada must expand production from the Alberta tar sands by a factor of five within the next five years, and prescribes precisely the sort of government noninterference that will make this a reality. I’m especially pleased that ExxonMobil will be playing a key role in that policy—by developing a renewable energy source that will actually benefit from our development of conventional fuels while providing a fallback position for energy sustainability under any conditions that arise.

[Slide: Beautiful horizon]

But first, I need to say how wonderful it is to see, on all the faces here today, the childlike exuberance of a great industry in full flower, biting deep into all of life’s opportunities, and, like a giddy and well-fed infant, savoring that life to the fullest.

[Slide: Man holding up ear of wheat]

And why not? Our product, after all, has made possible everything we see around us—our whole civilization. We depend on oil for food, and for getting food to our tables. Without oil, at least four billion people would starve—and even those of us left would have a very tough time. But I’m not here today to pat us all on the back; I’m here to speak of Plan B’s. Because the dire situation I’ve just mentioned is in fact possible.

[Slide: Lightning]

As we know, if climate science is right, there’s a growing possibility of global calamities, triggering migration, death, and conflicts on a scale never before imagined. This spiral of trouble would make the oil infrastructure utterly useless, and starving would become the new black. We *don’t* believe this will happen. Statistically, the chances are still far below 50 percent. But even if they’re just 10 percent, we as responsible corporate citizens *must* consider what we would do to keep the fuel flowing. We owe it to ourselves, to our shareholders, and to the very concept of sustainability.

We at Exxon firmly believe that a free market will, if left to its own devices, always find solutions to the dilemmas humanity faces. And in this case, there’s a surprisingly simple solution—one that goes hand in hand with current energy policies and actually depends on our continued development of the tar sands, for example.

[Slides: *The birth of the sun; a barren earth; life; animals*]

To explain how it works, let's take a trip into the past. Five billion years ago, our sun was born. For the next half-billion years, earth was a wasteland, full of nothing but the dead stuff of nature. [Slide: *Sequence of evolution*]

Then one day, matter in its infinite ingenuity discovered a fabulous new way to store energy. It used sunlight and good old-fashioned rock smarts to turn water and dirt into something that could store power long enough to walk around and develop speech. Today, we call it *life*—but it's just an incredible solar battery that pushed its way across eons, past the shifting of continents and the burning-out of stars, transforming itself into countless species, and leaving them behind—all the way into the present.

[Slide: *Suited man in conference hall*]

And into this conference hall right here today.

[Slide: *Map of Mesopotamia*]

Along its age-old path, this battery we call life kept getting smarter, until the Mesopotamians. Then one day, a resident of ancient Uruk made a crucial discovery: other beings were great at storing energy.

[Slide: *Resident of Uruk*]

Who first had the idea to use the oil of a recently living animal to light his or her house? Whoever that Einstein was, he single-handedly created the energy industry and thus revolutionized civilization. For the next few thousand years, animals were burned for light and warmth.

[Slide: *Puffin*]

Even today, Shetland Islanders lop the heads off of puffins and put wicks in the stumps to make candles.

[Slide: *Captain Ahab*]

Europe's big innovation in this matter was the discovery of the ultimate mobile energy storehouses—those mighty leviathans of the deep, the whales, which until the late 1800s remained Europe's primary source of illuminant energy.

[Slide: *Canadian striking oil*]

Then, in the mid-1800s, some folks here in Canada discovered that nature had already done a large part of the work that men were still risking their lives for! At some point, maybe an asteroid hit.

[Slide: *Canadian under asteroid*]

Or perhaps the earth's temperature just swung wildly south. Pretty much everything died, and the fields of death, ensepulchered by eons, were compressed into great, deep oceans—of oil. This “petroleum,” so much more abundant than the fluids of the more recently departed, made possible an unprecedented scale of market performance, leading inexorably to the panoply of amazing technologies we see in the exhibit halls here today. The battery we call *life* had finally come into its own.

Again, there are dark mutterings today that climate change linked to oil use could lead to massive population loss, migrations, and conflicts, making pipelines and oil wells useless. Without oil, the earth's carrying capacity would go from 6 billion people to as low as 200 million. That would be a great tragedy. Yet why must we tremble like little children before a monster? Why can't we instead be like the man from Uruk, that Ur-industrialist who discovered a new source of energy for the world? After all, if we can ensure an uninterrupted supply of fuel in even the worst of calamities, there will be plenty of ways the market can address the new situation. What we really need is something as plentiful as petroleum but much less dependent on infrastructure—or something as useful as whales but infinitely more abundant. And therein lies the key. Just as the death of ancient life-forms meant oil for us today, so in a fuelless world the massive hydrocarbon store flowing out of the biosphere could mean a massive new resource—if we know how to tap in. Why wait millions of years? The energy is there right now. All we need to do is climb back *up* the fossil chain and close the circle of life.

[Slide: *Vivoleum logo*]

We're calling this product Vivoleum. Basically, it compresses the work of brute, stupid time into hours rather than eons. Any biomass whatsoever is quickly and cheaply turned into something close enough to gasoline to run my Escalade.

[Slide: *Animation of factory*]

We envision large-scale plants that will process many thousands of barrels per hour. The feedstock is cold-pressed through a series of vortex separators, blowdown evaporators, et cetera, and then further refined into ethanol, biodiesel, and so on. The plants will be fully off-site-remote-capable, requiring a minimum of on-site hands to operate. But not all plants need be large or sophisticated—the technology is simple, and the low pressures and temperatures required will allow small-scale—even mobile—refining capacity.

[Slide: *Space*]

Anywhere biological resources find themselves freed, Vivoleum can grant the at-risk civilization an income stream—where and when it's most needed. It's so compact that it could even work in outer space!

[Slide: *Ford plant*]

Here on earth, every Vivoleum plant will be built with environmentality in mind, with living roofs just like Ford's plant in Dearborn, Michigan. All downstream waste will be turned into secondary products such as a building material we're calling Vivaboard, and the liquid effluent can be used as agricultural-grade organic brownwater. These will be the greenest manufacturing centers ever built, signaling love for the earth through their very existence.



Eld, by Mamma Anderson, was exhibited this summer at Moderna Museet, in Stockholm, Sweden.

[Slide: Train]

Cultural sensitivity will also be paramount. Historical parallels will need to be considered carefully. But this train of thought needn't derail us. After all, when the British in Egypt used mummies to fuel their locomotives, they were using a limited resource that could not be replenished, and they were committing a crime against history still keenly felt by Egyptologists. The Vivoleum feedstock, on the other hand, is renewable and unprecious, and it responds to the needs of a shrinking market by increasing supply, which in turn stimulates the market: the dance of capital appears in full flower.

[Slide: Captain with telescope peering over tar sands]

Indeed, unlike all other alternative-energy

sources, Vivoleum will need no government push—current policies won't have to change. Vivoleum will never encroach on the market's natural right to continue seeking new pastures. The Alberta tar sands, for example, can continue providing a stimulus to Canada, the U.S., and the global market; and in the event climate change does prove unmanageable, Vivoleum will allow the living superstrate of our precious planet to yield an acceptable future.

Ladies and gentlemen, now I'm going to introduce someone who will explain Exxon's real purpose in coming here today—to honor an individual no longer with us. Here is the head of public relations for the Exxon Vivoleum program, also a special adviser to the NPC on Vivoleum: Florian Osenberg.

FLORIAN OSENBERG: Thank you, Shepard. Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, I'm holding in my hand a candle. Right now there are people fanning out through the room handing out candles just like this. I want each of you to take one, and then I want you to pass the flame to your neighbor. I guess you already know something about passing the flame. From what I hear, you had the Olympic torch here in Calgary, and you managed to keep it from going out even with the oil boom here to distract you.

Let me tell you a little bit about these candles. First of all, you'll notice some irregularities, maybe even bits of hair and the like. That's because they're all custom-cast and one-of-a-kind. I already see a couple of you holding your noses. This

[Send-off]

YOU WILL NOT BURY ME

From a letter sent in March by Amir Vehabovic, a forty-five-year-old man who lives in Gradiška, Bosnia, to his friends after only his mother attended his hoax funeral. Translated from the Serbo-Croatian by Michael Leidig.

To all my dear "friends,"

Some of you I have known since early school days, others I have only forged a relationship with in the last few years. But until my "funeral," I considered all of you close friends. So it was with shock and, I admit, sadness and anger that I realized not one of you managed to find the time to come and say goodbye to me when you heard I was to be buried. I would have understood if just some of you came, bearing flowers or words of apology from others who could not make it. But no. Not a single one of you turned up to pay your last respects. I lived for our friendships. They meant as much to me as life itself. But how easy it was for you all to forget the pledges of undying friendship that I have heard on so many occasions. How different our ideas of friendship seem to be. I paid a lot of money to get a fake death certificate and to bribe undertakers to deliver an empty coffin. I thought that my funeral would be a good joke—the kind of prank we have all played on one another over the years. Now I have just one last message for you: My "funeral" might have been staged, but you might as well consider me dead, because I will not be seeing any of you again.

is something we haven't been able to eliminate yet, but it'll burn off quickly—impurities tend to float to the head.

[Holds up a candle]

You might look at your candle and think, What's the big deal? It's just a simple candle. Well, you're right. But that's just the point. Just like petroleum's liquid subterranean feedstocks, Vivoleum's ambulant feedstocks can be rendered into just about anything: paraffin, gasoline, even plastic to make a container—for an energy drink, for example. *Anything*.

But what's truly amazing about these candles is not that they're slightly irregular, or even that they're made from Vivoleum. What I'm personally in awe of, is that the Vivoleum they're made from comes from one point-source, made available by a very generous man. His name was Reggie Watts, a real everyman, an ordinary person who, as ordinary people sometimes do, did something extraordinary. Indeed, more than anyone else I can think of, Reggie gave his all so that our company—and indeed our whole industry—could continue to fuel our fight to the finish. It's because he played such an important role in this product's development that we're honoring him here today. With no further ado, Reggie Watts!

[Video begins. An African-American man with a large Afro is sweeping a loading dock and singing Debbie Boone's "You Light Up My Life."]

OLDER BUSINESSMAN: I knew Reggie because he was our cleaning man in the Houston head office.

YOUNGER BUSINESSMAN: Reggie was a great worker. He did a great job at our company.

WOMAN AT DESK: Down-to-earth, kindhearted, willing to do anything for anybody.

MAINTENANCE WORKER: He would always be singing, because that's the type of guy he was, always happy. When Reggie was there, the workplace was alive.

REGGIE WATTS: I worked in Maintenance for a while, moved up to Maintenance 2. Started doing cleanup, toxic cleanup. People said I was afraid of it, but I wasn't. I just wasn't. We had a level-three alert. I dunno, I just kind of blew it, I guess. After I heard from the doctor that I was going to die, I felt like I had something to live for.

YOUNGER BUSINESSMAN: It was a very brave choice that Reggie made.

WATTS: I'm gonna die anyways. So, yeah, might as well give it a whirl!

YOUNGER BUSINESSMAN: Reggie was willing to make that sacrifice for the betterment of humanity, so for that we all salute him.

WATTS: I think I would like to be a candle. I think a candle would be fun because there are so many uses for a candle. I think that would be nice, like,

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if I was a candle on a table when people, when they first met each other. On a date. I think that would be great. I would love that. That'd be a hoot.

[Sings "You Light Up My Life." The video ends, and the organizers eject the presenters from the stage.]

WOLFF: [Speaking to reporters on the conference-room floor] We're not talking about killing anyone. We're talking about using them after nature has done the hard work. After all, 150,000 people already die from climate change-related effects every year. That's only going to go up—maybe way, way up. Will it all go to waste? That would be cruel.

[Grooming]

FACIAL REVOLUTION

From Fidel Castro: *My Life*, a book of interviews with the Cuban president by Ignacio Ramonet, to be published in October by Simon & Schuster. Ramonet is editor in chief of *Le Monde diplomatique*.

The story of our beards is very simple. We didn't have any razor blades. When we found ourselves in the middle of the wilderness, up in the Sierra, everybody just let their beards and hair grow, and that turned into a kind of badge of identity. For the *campesinos*, for the press, for the reporters—we were *los barbudos*, the bearded ones. It had its positive side: in order for a spy to infiltrate us, he had to start preparing months ahead of time.

Later, with the triumph of the Revolution, we kept our beards to preserve the symbolism. The only disadvantage is that white hairs show up first in your beard. Some of the men cut their beards the minute the white hairs started to show, because you could hide your age better without a beard than with one. Besides that, a beard has a further practical advantage: you don't have to shave every day. If you multiply the fifteen minutes you spend shaving every day by the number of days in a year, you'll see that you devote almost 5,500 minutes to shaving. An eight-hour day of work consists of 480 minutes, so if you don't shave you gain about ten days you can devote to work, to reading, to sports, to whatever you like. Not to mention the money you save in razor blades, soap, after-shave, and hot water.

[Testimony]

THE SPY WHO CAME IN AND WAS COLD

From an April 17 hearing before members of the House of Representatives, on the Central Intelligence Agency's extraordinary-rendition program. Michael Scheuer, the author of *Imperial Hubris*, designed and managed the rendition program and was chief of the CIA's Bin Laden unit from 1996 to 1999.

REP. BILL DELAHUNT (D., MASS.): When you seized individuals in Europe and either held them or transferred them to another country, did you understand that there was legal authority permitting such captures?

MICHAEL SCHEUER: You know, I was born at night but not last night, sir. There is no operation at the CIA that is conducted without the approval of lawyers. It is the bane of our existence, and it is a detriment to the defense of America, but, nonetheless, that is the fact. I didn't get paid to make legal decisions. I got paid to protect Americans. And as long as the lawyers signed off, it got done.

DELAHUNT: Did the analysis that such seizures were legal include an assessment that the individuals seized were unlawful enemy combatants?

SCHEUER: I neither know nor care, sir. That is not my concern. My concern is to identify enemies of America.

DELAHUNT: So you don't know?

SCHEUER: I know there was much more consideration under Bush about how to handle these people than under Clinton, sir, when we joked about what would happen to them in Egyptian prisons.

DELAHUNT: You were under orders to remove them from—

SCHEUER: Sir, a half-assed bureaucrat like me is not going to take any prisoner anywhere in this world without the authority of the executive branch.

DELAHUNT: But you have said that, as far as you or senior CIA officers were concerned, you would have preferred to take the seized individuals to the United States as POWs, because interrogation is not monumentally important.

SCHEUER: In very rare cases it is very important, sir, but POW is the best status you can give these people. Throw them in a stockade, let the Red Cross bring them cookies, let them write to their mama. But let's be clear: the only reason we would have preferred that is that we knew we were going to get hung out to dry. No one really cares what happens to