

Cradle to Cradle Philosophy Summarized:

Imagine yourself living in the garbage you produce everyday. You have eaten but you have no place to dispose of the scraps. The wrapper that covered the goods you just consumed have no place to go except in your house. Where will you store it? What will it smell like over time? Were there any toxic materials used in the wrapper that may deteriorate over time and that will now be a part of your household? After a few months will your house be big enough to store the waste? Will you have to move? Where will you move to? Will life be more expensive or less expensive there? In simplest terms, these are the issues that are confronted in Cradle to Cradle philosophy.

Current industrial production techniques in most areas of society are based on outmoded methods when energy was cheap, resources appeared abundant, and fewer people inhabited the planet. This scenario no longer exists. A rethinking of our "materialist" philosophy of life requires that we consider ourselves as a part of the world and not as a separate entity outside the environment. As industrialists and bankers measure a country's wealth by the production, distribution, and accumulation of goods, a new paradigm is required which takes in account the damage done to our ecosystem. We live in a world where resources are taken for granted. The soil that purifies the water, that water that falls from the sky, the natural world which humans have plundered over time has rarely if ever been taken into account on the balance sheets of bankers and industrialists. The only time we humans take notice is if the land is poisoned or becomes a burden to our "tax base." Forests and the diversity of wildlife they support are not looked upon as a system which replenishes the soil from which we grow food, purifies the water that we drink, or purifies the air we breath. It is looked upon as just being there for use when the need arrives. When that source is depleted you move on. A scorched earth policy has been our modus operandi. Maybe this is hard-wired into us from our hunter gatherer nomadic prehistoric days, but things need immediate change. We no longer live in caves though the need may soon arrive.

A more serious look at our symbiotic relationship with the planet balances the damage we as humans have done to the natural system against the old method of perceived wealth (GNP, GDP et al), and determine how much it will cost to replenish that supply. **William McDonough (Architect) and Michael Braungart (Chemist)** are authors, who are looking at life anew and redefining how humans should produce "things." This new process uses nature as the template to use in our designs.

There is no such thing as waste in the natural world. All things that exist on the planet which have been and are produced "naturally" are designed to return to the ecosystem that they were a part of...including us. In the natural process of life, birth, and decay all naturally occurring objects become food, or energy or both. Everything that occurs naturally nourishes the eco-system as a whole. This closed loop finite system has worked and will continue to work for centuries more if we try to imitate the way the planet has evolved, and incorporate it into our own designs.

The authors go on to explain in detail that this is not pie in the sky wishful thinking. They illustrate how designers are currently taking on the challenges that face them to create things that imitate nature. They speak of a washing machine that extracts detergent from the water after use and places it into a reservoir where the residual detergent material is returned to the manufacturer of the detergent for reuse in making "new detergent." The process reduces the artificial need for water purification techniques that place a strain on our infrastructure. They highlight many more innovations in building design, auto design that are using the no-waste philosophy that exists at the core of life.

NO WASTE. Anything you produce must at worst have no effect on the planetary cycle, and at best have a positive influence. If you produce a paper wrapper, make the wrapper out of materials that once they decay they produce a positive effect such as seeds are embedded in the paper that are indigenous flowers, or the materials within the paper promote a bacteria that occurs naturally in the soil which worms or some other insect loves to eat.

You design a plastic container which can be reused over and over again. Since plastic never decays. Make it so it can be used and the people that use it profit from its reuse. **William McDonough and Michael Braungart have designed a set of criteria which certifies companies in this endeavor.**

"Cradle to Cradle Certification provides a company with a means to tangibly, credibly measure achievement in environmentally-intelligent design and helps customers purchase and specify products that are pursuing a broader definition of quality."

Some areas of interest to Graphic Designers might be:

<http://www.begreenpackaging.com/>

Steelcase Company

USPS

<http://www.c2ccertified.com/>

Whatever the process. Make sure there is **NO WASTE**. Humans need to reduce, reuse, recycle and, unfortunately for some, regulate their base desires toward living in a "sustainable" fashion. The planet will profit and so will we as long as we respect the diversity that exists at the core of this system, and recognize that our dependency on the health of that system makes us all wealthy.