



CREATE A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF ANY HOUSEHOLD PRODUCT'S LIFECYCLE, FROM 'CRADLE TO GRAVE'

The Brief

Select any common household durable product (such as a hairdryer, dishwasher or car) and design a visual representation of its lifetime use of material resources, from 'cradle to grave'.

Mandatory requirements

Your visuals may be designed for any medium that a citizen might use, such as an information sheet obtained through the post, a screen on a website, at the point of purchase or as a display on a mobile phone and must:

- Enable consumers to research the product's environmental credentials prior to purchase
- Transform the information supporting those credentials into an effective and compelling visual narrative

Target users

Any member of the general public contemplating a visit to a retailer (either on the high street or online) to buy a durable household product, but wishes to research the product's environmental credentials before buying. Retailers may also wish to research this information before purchasing products from their suppliers, so you should consider them as potential consumers too.

Considerations

In order to behave differently we need to perceive things differently. An increased awareness of materials use and resource efficiency is key to achieving greater efficiency in the economy as a whole. Research shows that when people become more aware of their spending on energy, they use less. The same can happen if we make our waste, sourcing and use of materials visible.

Every product entering our lives has a hidden history, an undocumented inventory of wasted or lost materials that are used in its lifecycle (production, transport, use, and disposal). Bruce Sterling once challenged designers to imagine what it would be like if carbon dioxide were red, and our wasteful emissions turned the sky to the color of blood. What if we had the eco-equivalent of a Geiger counter with sensors that would click, eerily, whenever we left the tap on?

How will you make the aggregate waste of materials in everyday products visible?

Background

The amount of waste matter generated in the manufacture of a single laptop computer for example is close to four thousand times its weight on your lap. Fifteen to nineteen tons of energy and materials are consumed in the fabrication of one desktop computer.

A great strain is put on the environment during the production of a computer. Many components require the use of high grade minerals that can be obtained only through major mining operations and energy-intensive transformation processes.

As the writers of Natural Capitalism explain, industry uses billions of pounds' worth of materials in manufacturing the products we take for granted, and this includes the various infrastructures (machines, energy, roads and buildings) required to deliver them.

In one year the amount of matter and energy wasted by the average North American consumer is roughly one million pounds in weight a year. Europeans are better, but not by a lot. These are not rumours – the consumption of materials in industrial society has been measured with increasing precision since the 1960s. All around us, but for the most part invisibly, companies waste tailings, gangue, fly ash, slurry, sludge, slag, flue gases, construction debris and methane.

Dott (Designs of the time) is a 10 year programme of design innovation with the first, Dott 07, taking place in North East England. Dott 07 is about the co-creation of tangible improvements in the daily lives of real people in real places. Dott 07 is funded by a partnership between the Design Council and the regional development agency One NorthEast.

Deliverables

Work mounted on no more than four A3 or A2 boards. Any digital media must be sent on a CD containing Mac-compatible files which run in Quicktime, Director, Flash or any HTML-supported web browser only. Files must not exceed 100 MB. 3D models/mock-ups are also permitted.

Further information

- Sarah Graham, "Making Microchips Takes Mountain of Materials," Scientific American, November 6, 2002, available at: <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?chanID=sa003&articleID=0000E57E-E47B-1DC6-AF71809EC588EEDF>
- PRé Consultants, "What Is LCA?" available at: http://www.pre.nl/life_cycle_assessment/life_cycle_assessment.htm
- William McDonough and Michael Baumgart, in introduction to *Cradle to Cradle: Remake the Way We Make Things* (New York: North Point, 2002)
- <http://www.cradletocradlehome.com/>
- <http://www.worldchanging.com/>
- Thackara, John, *In the bubble: Designing in A Complex World* (chapter on Lightness) MIT Press 2005
- Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and Hunter Lovins, *Natural Capitalism* (London: Earthscan, 1999)

Brief set by

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