

# Week 4 — Deconstruct Capitalism

Capitalism... what a loaded word. The first step to deconstruct anything is to break it down to understand it. According to Karl Marx, capitalism involves private ownership of production means, mass production technologies, profit-driven motives, and the accumulation of surplus value. Workers are portrayed as compelled to sell their labor power to make a living. Within this work, Marx's theory of historical materialism is prominently developed, shedding light on the stark realities of industrial exploitation and social hardship; alienation is depicted as the dehumanization of workers and exploitation.

The way we make things reveals our ideologies, our values, flaws, and hopes and dreams. There are two types of planetary material flows: biological nutrients that benefit the biosphere and technical nutrients that serve the technosphere (industrial processes). William McDonough and Michael Braungart introduced the "Cradle to Cradle" concept in their 2002 book, "Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things." This book advocates for an environmentally sustainable approach to design and production. The Hannover Principles, written in 1992 for the EXPO 2000 World's Fair in Hannover, Germany, serve as foundational principles for sustainable design, emphasizing our interdependence with nature. McDonough and Braungart critique the traditional "Cradle to Grave" industrial model, which results in waste, pollution, and resource depletion as products are discarded. They propose a "Cradle to Cradle" approach, where products are designed with recycling and environmental safety in mind. Cradle-to-Grave is the linear industrial model, while Cradle-to-Cradle advocates designing products for recyclability and environmental harmony. The authors coin the term "Monstrous Hybrids" for products or processes that harm the environment.

by combining unnatural materials. These hybrids result in pollution, waste, and resource depletion. The Cradle-to-Cradle approach focuses on using materials that can safely reintegrate into natural systems.



*Grayson Perry's Work: Selfie with Political Causes, 2018.  
Photo by Christina Yang.*

## **Selfie with Political Causes, 2018**

Colour woodcut

Edition of 15 plus 2 artist's proofs

I made this piece in response to the rise of the social justice warriors, particularly online. They are out to rid the world of racism, homophobia, sexism and poverty but they struggle with the unhelpful toxic by-products of democracy, free speech and tolerance. The imagery was inspired by an Indian miniature painting - an equestrian portrait where the horse was enormous with a tiny figure perched upon it. I liked the feeling of a tiny human sat upon a powerful mount that was a bit out of control. This woodblock print was cut by a computer-controlled router, then hand-printed using the back of a spoon. The dimensions were governed by the largest available size of Pampas for the frame.

Courtesy the artist, Pampas | Contemporary Editions Ltd  
and Victoria Miro

*Grayson Perry's description: Selfie with Political Causes, 2018. Photo by Christina Yang.*

I had a visit to the Royal Scottish Academy (National Galleries of Scotland) where I had the opportunity to explore Grayson Perry's exhibition, *Smash Hits*. The piece, "Selfie with Political Causes" (2018) left a lasting impression because it challenges the superficial nature of our society. The artwork and *Cradle-to-Cradle* both critically examine the prevailing cultural norms and practices. "Selfie with Political Causes" questions the authenticity of outward appearances, highlighting the hollowness that can exist beneath constructed images. Similarly, *Cradle-to-Cradle*

thinking encourages a reevaluation of the traditional linear industrial model, where products are designed with a focus on their outward appearance and functionality but often lack sustainability and consideration for their environmental impact.

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### **Reference list**

Lee, Deishin, and Lionel Bony. "Cradle-to-Cradle Design at Herman Miller: *Moving Toward Environmental Sustainability*." Harvard Business School Case 607-003, May 2007.

Harkness, H. (2023) Theme 2\_Lecture 2A [PDF], Experience and the Environment: *Labour, Social Justice and Environmental Design*. University of Edinburgh.