

*The Pre and Perinatal  
Grounds of Capitalism  
and the  
Free-Market Economy*

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# THE PRE AND PERINATAL GROUNDS OF CAPITALISM AND THE FREE MARKET ECONOMY

## **Preface**

This paper was formally delivered in Cracow on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1992 as a presentation to a conference of the International Society of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine. The visuals have been drawn from a variety of sources too numerous to detail individually, but gratefully acknowledged as providing a richly illustrative resource.

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# THE PRE AND PERINATAL GROUND OF CAPITALISM AND THE FREE-MARKET ECONOMY

## **Introduction**

Unresolved trauma laid down at any stage of human development drives a subsequent cyclic pattern of repetition. Fixatedly frozen at a point in time representing: the last tolerable moment before being overwhelmed by hyper-stress, the person continues to act in the here and as if facing the next moment of the there and then. Processes of projection and displacement mould the psychodrama of the life-situation until it mirrors, matches and so regenerates the dynamics of the precipitating event.

Where the primary trauma is shared in common, the cyclic psychodrama is enacted in common. With the common ground collusionally denied, the dynamic process is corporately constructed. It is supported by symbolism and mythology and socially reified into an unquestionable ideology.

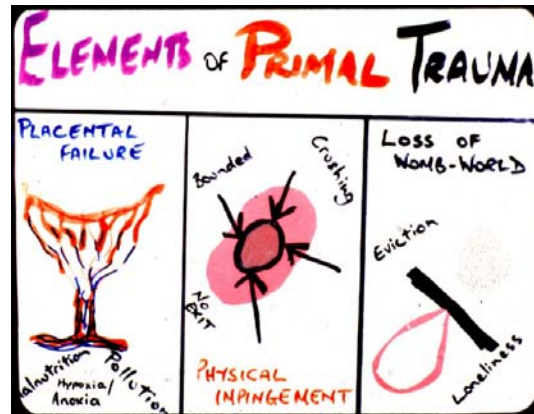
It is the thesis of this paper that the dynamics of world capitalism and the free-market economy (as also of Marxist-Leninism and the centrally planned state economy) are driven by common unconscious processes of resource-related fixation. These reflect the normal conditions of placental failure which constitute the initial stage in the universal experience of the trauma of birth.

Current global experience of overcrowding, pollution and resource depletion appears to be restimulating the common foetal unconscious and generating potentially catastrophic acting-out of primitive psychodrama on the world stage.

\* \* \* \* \*

# CAPITALISM AS A CONSTRUCT OF THE COMMON FOETAL UNCONSCIOUS

The human species is unique among mammals in the distribution and intensity of perinatal impingement<sup>1</sup>. In evolutionary terms, the condition represents a compromise between the advantages of the large brain and upright posture weighed against the disadvantages of placental failure



and the pain, crushing and cranial damage of the birth process. The perinatal organism is now recognised as a highly sensitive learning system<sup>2</sup> so that the trauma point results in massive physical and psychological imprinting.

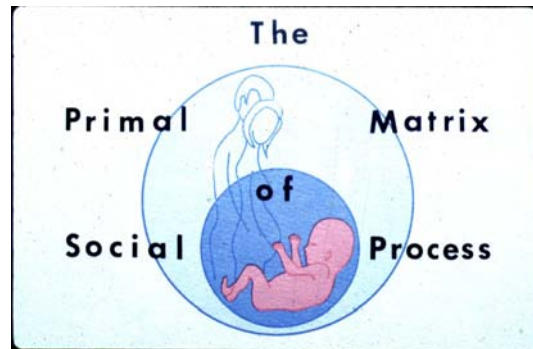


Any parents purposefully subjecting their new-born child to a similar experience would rightly be charged with engaging in an extreme form of child abuse<sup>3</sup>.



The universal occurrence of the trauma of birth leads to a universal condition of fixation and repression at the point of full-term foetal development. This ground of the common foetal unconscious is carried forward and enacted in repetitive cycles of common adult psychodrama in the dynamics of war and religion and in the multiple facets of social process and ideology<sup>4</sup>.

The split-off and denied foetal self is represented in the adult psyche as the matrix of anxiety against which the paranoid-schizoid defences are deployed<sup>5</sup>.

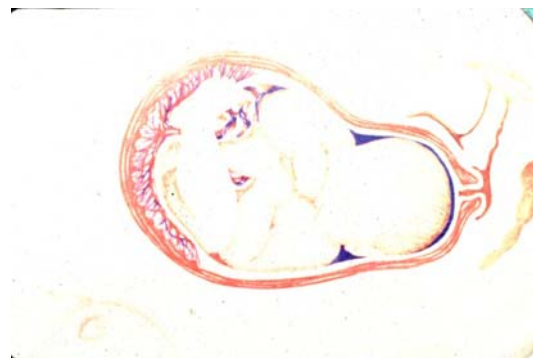


The adult human behaves in resonance with its companions as if facing imminent impingement from a persecutory cervix, in defence against which the most extreme forms of destructive activity are required and to pacify which the most bizarre rituals of religious mythology are engaged<sup>6</sup>.

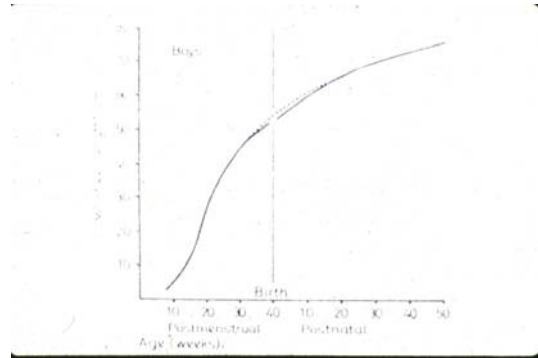
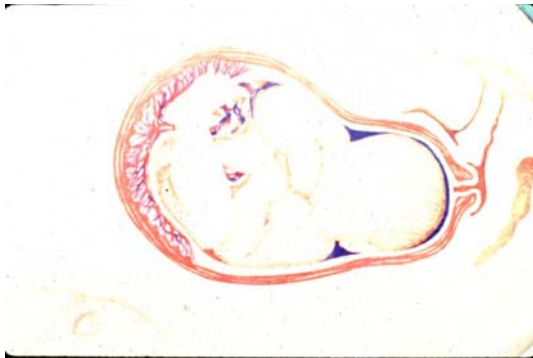
The point of psychodynamic fixation is determined by the onset of transmarginal stress



The fixated state is frozen with the characteristics of the immediately pre-traumatic condition, namely pre-labour, full-term foetal experience. Much attention has been paid to the effects of parturitional trauma on the subsequent individual and social behaviour. Corporate enactment of re-stimulated birth trauma tends to appear at the boundaries of groups and systems particularly in times of stressful transition. However, the stable patterns of social transaction reflect the fixated conditions of the pre-trauma state<sup>7</sup>.



During the final weeks of a normal pregnancy there is a progressive failure of placental function.



This would appear to result from the comparatively recent evolutionary adoption of the upright posture<sup>8</sup>. The weight of the foetus, instead of being suspended by the abdominal muscles from a horizontal or angled spine, now presses vertically down into the pelvic basin and inhibits the blood supply to the uterus. Transfer of nutrients and oxygen from maternal to foetal circulation degrades as also does the discharge of foetal waste product. As a consequence the foetal growth rate falters and slows in conditions of increasing malnutrition, hypoxia and pollution. It is this situation which determines the parameters of the foetal experience fixated in the trauma of birth.



In so far as the trauma leads to a process of idealisation, so the fixated regression is to an ideally good uterine space<sup>9</sup>. Here there is unlimited room for expansion, unconstricted access to whatever resources are required to sustain exponential growth and environmental ability to accept and dispose of all waste products. These ideal foetal assumptions appear to be the unconscious symbolic drivers of utopian dreams,

philosophies, ideologies and movements across the ages.

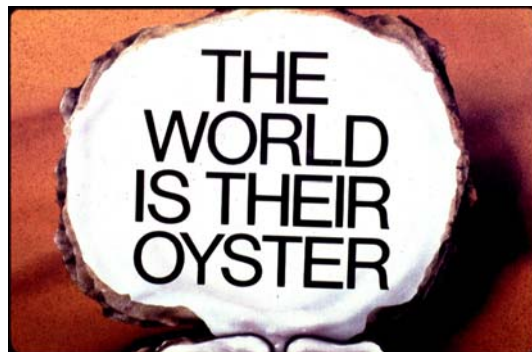


Their seductive power is profound. Their failure or breakdown undermines the effectiveness of the repressive defences so releasing intense foetal fear of constriction, deprivation and invasive poisonous pollution. If the defences are not repaired and the regression cannot be re-established, the social system moves on towards the titanic struggle of birth, mobilising all resources to the boundary in the psychotic psychodrama of war<sup>10</sup>.

Even when the defences against primal anxiety are comparatively intact, the position of the fixated foetal unconscious dominates the world-view and the environmental transactions of the human organism both individually and corporately<sup>11</sup>. The resource supply must be sufficient to sustain continuous growth. Faltering in the accumulation process throws the subject into increasingly intense anxiety. It is increase in wealth, not the absolute level of wealth, which sedates the paranoia. Resource inputs must more than match the present requirements. This excess of income over out-goings is demanded in order to generate growth for tomorrow, not just to maintain life for today. While the fixated foetal assumptions are in place, enough can never be enough, whether in terms of capital or income. Zero growth in either parameter signals the onset of placental failure and triggers the restimulation of psychotic anxiety originating in the impingement of birth.



Attitudes to wealth and resources appear to be laid down in this matrix. The human organism, traumatised in the birth process and in consequence carrying fixated foetal experience forward into adult life, is innately paranoid<sup>12</sup>. The primitive anxieties can only be contained if there is a continuous process of wealth accumulation represented by an excess of income over expenditure in all parameters. Obsessive, angst-driven struggle for resources is the order of the day. In the light of these dynamics, the norms, value-systems and processes of capitalism and the power-struggle of the free-market economy can be seen as the social construct of anxiety defence reified into a resource-related ideology.



## MODELLING THE SYSTEM

Consider an organism with two operating states, namely stasis and growth. In the first state income is required to replace resources used in the maintenance of the stable condition. In the second state continuously increasing income is demanded to sustain a pattern of exponential growth. The second state is latent while the first state is operative, but it can be switched on by any perception of resource shortage. In psychodynamic terms the switch is from a satisfied to a paranoid position.

If a small population of such organisms operating in the stasis mode is deployed in a comparatively unlimited resource-rich environment it will multiply biologically in an exponential fashion. At some later time the population will reach a stage at which available resources are no longer being replenished at the same rate at which they are being consumed. At this junction the organism switches from stasis maintenance to exponential resource consumption as a condition of survival. Environmental resources are rapidly depleted and biological multiplication slows down. Resource demands, however, continue to escalate. Any wealth accumulated by one organism is perceived as potential income by all others. Transactions are driven by paranoid processes, the objective being to gain more resource from the other in exchange for less payment from the self. If power between the trading partners is absolutely balanced the transaction is equal. The equilibrium is, however, unstable and in practice small differentials in power lead to an imbalance in the trading relationship. As a result wealth and power begin to accrete in the hands of the more powerful while the resources of the less powerful are depleted. The process further destabilises the power balance and tips the terms of trade in favour of the rich.

Since local resources are unable to sustain the exponential demands even of a stable population, extra supplies are sought by migration into other areas where the population is either below the critical threshold or is physically unable to defend itself. Genocide, invasion, colonisation, exploitation or expropriation follow. Nodes of resource acquisition are established in the new territory. Some liquid assets may be pumped in to the new situation provided the result is a leaching out of greater assets in the long term. The strategy of "aid and trade" serves the extraction of resources from the less wealthy/powerful at all points of the system<sup>13</sup>. They are accumulated in the possession of the most wealthy/powerful so increasing the demand for more resources to sustain the exponential growth.

The system is inherently unstable. In an infinitely resourceful environment all members of the population can gain and sustain exponential growth of differing rates, albeit with accelerating inequity between rich and poor, powerful and powerless. In this situation the paranoid processes driven by the fixated foetal unconscious are unrestrained. Where independent centres of power and wealth accumulation collide the next stage of the foetal struggle is enacted<sup>14</sup>. Conflict breaks out and can escalate out of all proportion to the triggering signal<sup>15</sup>. Typically the conflict consumes vast resources in a very short time so driving the underlying system paranoia to a new level.



## BOUNDARY CONDITIONS OF A REAL WORLD

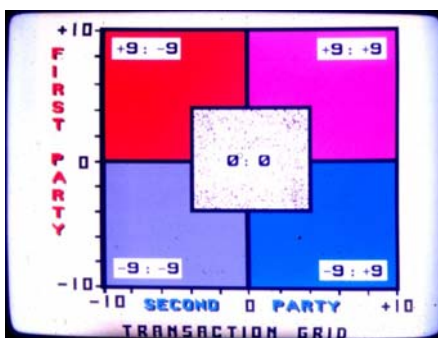
One of the fixated foetal assumptions embedded in the human value system treats the environment as an unlimited source. Reality is different.

The surface of "mother" earth is not an infinitely resourceful womb-lining<sup>16</sup>. The free-market capitalist system is deployed in a limited holding environment. As a result the impact of exponential resource use eventually impinges on the environment at all points<sup>17</sup>.



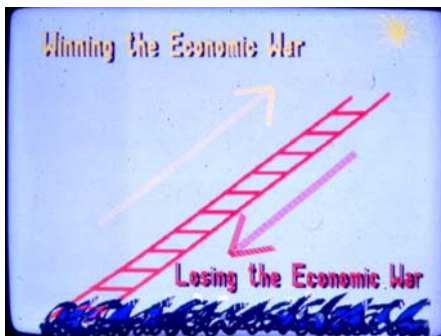
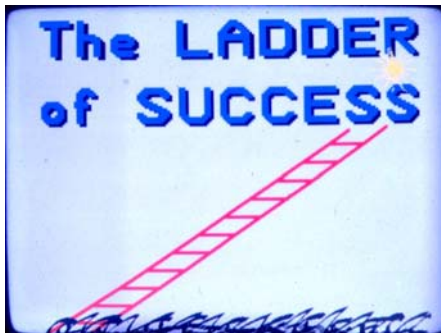
Instead of sustaining a slow but viable rate of exponential wealth accumulation, the poorest and least powerful (most vulnerable) sectors of the system are forced into increasing wealth degrade

in order to fuel the exponential demands of a shrinking but increasingly paranoid core<sup>18</sup>. Core pressures are transmitted through the periphery to the ecology which is systematically exploited to the point of collapse. Sectors of the environment and of the peripheral population which no longer serve the core as sources of wealth are marginalised and sequentially abandoned.



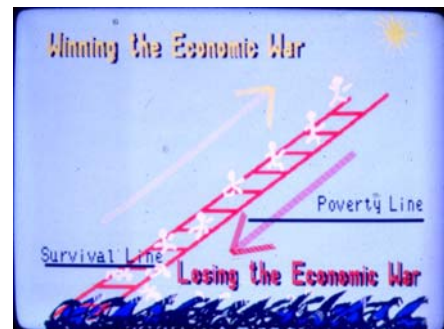
The resource-related power-struggle with its objective of maximising profit, growth-rate and wealth-accumulation generates a ladder of success.

Winning the economic war<sup>19</sup> involves climbing the ladder, while losing implies dropping back down it.



In an unlimitedly resourceful environment all players on the ladder survive and growth rates are positive for all ladder places. However, in reality, the resources are limited and the paranoid competition drives progressively larger numbers of the lower places into negative growth.

The lower end of the ladder plunges remorselessly past the absolute poverty line and the level below which survival itself is impossible creeps slowly upwards. Players at the top of the ladder, perceiving an economic abyss opening up beneath them compete ever more fiercely for the remaining resources so accelerating the process. The increasing intensity of the struggle for survival drives the search for resources to unsustainable levels<sup>20</sup>, mining the wealth of the environment to destruction, consuming capital reserves of fossil resource from ages past and cashing in the resources needed for the survival of future generations<sup>21</sup>.



Excessive wealth for the few at the expense of unsurvivable poverty for the many are inextricably linked symptoms of this bifurcatory system<sup>22</sup>. Attempts to alleviate poverty while sustaining the paranoid system parameters and protecting the rich and powerful from the effects of resource-limitation are unable to effect significant change<sup>23</sup>. System interventions tend to be made congruently with the dysfunctional system assumptions<sup>24</sup> leading to an exacerbation of poverty and a long-term removal of resources from the most vulnerable groups.



Another, often unrecognised, assumption of the foetal condition is that the environment is an unlimited sink.



It is perceived as capable of receiving and absorbing all waste produced during the process of growth<sup>25</sup>. Again reality is different.

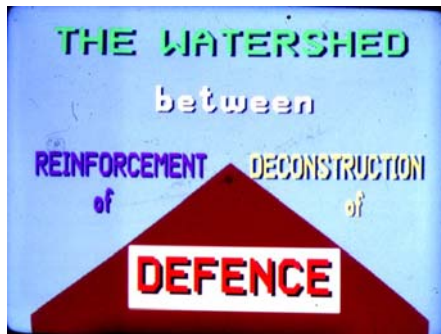
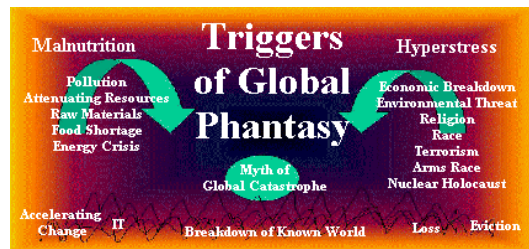
The body of "mother" earth is not an infinitely absorptive sink capable of taking in and disposing of any amount of waste material no matter what the volume or toxicity. As the pollution-creating activity of the human presence reaches a critical rate, the effects impinge on the already overstretched resource-producing capacity of the environment. In consequence at the point of maximum human dependency on the limited environmental resource, a sharp degrade in the environmental resource-production capacity is triggered. The impact of the paranoid swarm is to push the global system beyond the "positive sum" scenario of growth for all, beyond the "zero sum" scenario in which inequitable resource-sharing drives the weakest to the wall, and into the "negative sum" scenario of potentially catastrophic implosion.



## FOETAL ASSUMPTIONS AND GLOBAL PHANTASY

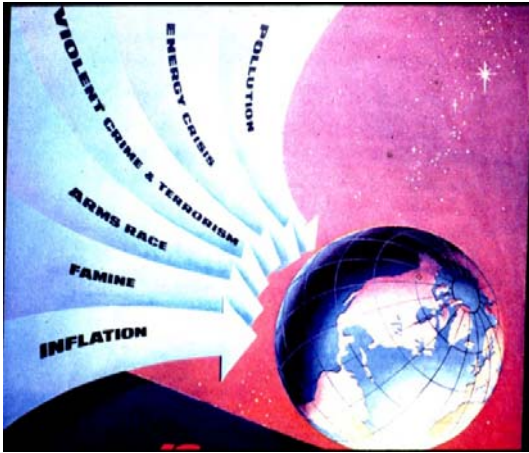
The persistence of the foetal assumptions in the face of reality betrays the intensity of the fixation generated by the perinatal impingement. Reality-testing and the taking of functional action requires the deconstruction of the perinatal defences and of the environmental phantasies to which they have given rise. It is only to be expected that any information that indicates breakdown of the idealised foetal environment is resisted and denied, for to accept it would be to expose the subject to intolerable levels of commonly repressed anxiety<sup>26</sup>. Intense resistance to functional change and the withdrawal of vital resources from the implementation of apparently rational and essential decisions is endemic<sup>27</sup>. Any change threatens to re-stimulate the common foetal unconscious and drive it towards the next level of trauma in the impingement of birth.

Re-repression is essential if the organism is not to be overwhelmed by apparently unbearable levels of stress. Essential information about current reality and adjustments required for survival are therefore re-repressed in concert with the precipitating trauma.

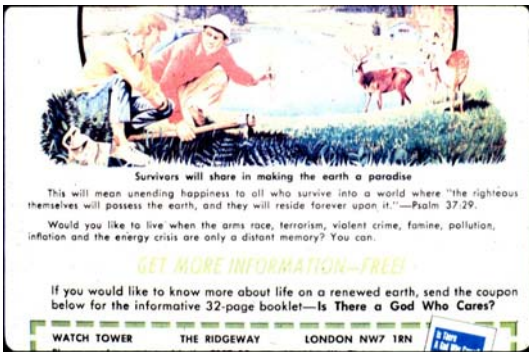


At this point the powerful religious and ideological defence-maintenance mechanisms of the species militate against the possibility of species survival. Myths of salvation symbolise the eternal retention of the idealised pre-natal state and reify at their boundaries the impingement of birth<sup>28</sup>. Their systemic assumptions are congruent with those of capitalism<sup>29</sup> whether of state or individual<sup>30</sup>. To question them is anathema. Not to question them could be fatal<sup>31</sup>.

As so often happens in individual psychodrama, the displaced and projected scenario of the fixated and repressed impingement recreates in the conscious present a recapitulation of the unconscious past. Over long periods of time, continuous processes of displacement, projection and re-introjection mould the environmental relations of the human species to the point at which they represent the conditions of the common experience of precipitating trauma. Once reified in this fashion, the ground of the global phantasy can be denied. It has been externalised. The common assumption of the corporate psychodrama is that the next events are already known, in other words it is assumed that the species is facing common placental failure leading to convulsive perinatal impingement and the titanic struggle between good and evil.



From such materials are the myths of Armageddon forged. The phantasy leads to an unrealistic hope that after great suffering and sacrifice the innocent will be "delivered"<sup>32</sup> in some dim awareness of the foetal perception that there is life after birth.



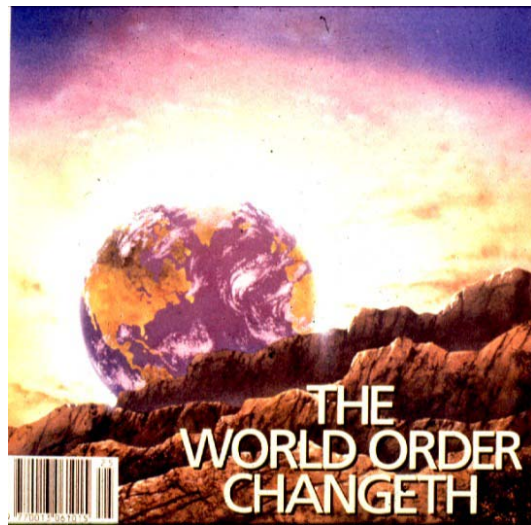
In reality there is now nowhere into which the species can be born. As we reach the saturation point of the limited holding environment there is no utopian Eden to be entered on the other side of battle. Indeed, armed conflict (and its associated defences even if unused) constitutes a massive destruction of the limited resources whose attenuation precipitated the response in the first place. It also tends to destroy the resource-producing capacity of the environment so intensifying the triggering of primal phantasy and setting up a self-energising feed-back loop of destruction. Paradoxically the drives that destroy our resources are intensified to defend us from the anxiety raised by the depletion of resources. It is in these conditions that the foetal assumptions emanating from the birth of the human species can become fatal assumptions precipitating the death of the human species.



## SOCIAL SANCTION AND THE IMPERATIVE OF INTEGRATION

In the past the sanctions and values of the medical profession have been built around an understanding of sickness as deviation from the norm. The paradigm of classical psychoanalysis was built on the same foundation<sup>33</sup>. Today we are coming face to face with the life-threatening sickness, the psycho-pathology of the norm itself<sup>34</sup>, in deviance from which lies our common hope of health. The enormity of the implications of the analysis outlined in this paper looms like a threatening taboo. However, the need to name the unnameable at that point of human history when owning our shadow becomes a prerequisite for survival, poses an imperative whose power ruptures all previous prohibition. Perhaps only now is it becoming possible to see a crack in our collusional repression through which we may spy those previously unconscious processes which have powered and moulded our civilisation and which now threaten its end.

As the edges of the Gaian<sup>35</sup> placenta calcify and crumple, as primitive memories are stirred by experience of pollution, malnutrition and overcrowding and the first fore-shocks of global constriction ripple round the world, we cannot afford the luxury of common perinatal defence. The old patterns of paranoid struggle, primal talion and foetal regression can no longer serve as the matrix of our value system<sup>36</sup>. The task facing us is nothing short of the creative catharsis of our perinatal impingement, the release from pre-natal fixation, the withdrawal of the projection of foetal assumptions from our relations, resources



and environment and the deconstruction of our defences and their associated institutions reified across the millennia. Even then we have only reached the end of the beginning. Beyond lies the further task of reconstructing new value systems driven by reality-testing in a new world order governed by the needs for sustainable development, just distribution of the means of survival and global inter-dependence with an ecology freed from the projected phantasies of a uterine environment.

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