

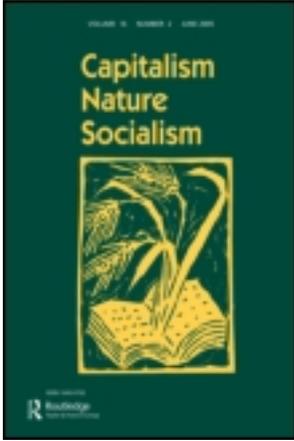
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ECOFEMINIST ALTERNATIVES

Destruction through “Creation”—The “Critical Theory of Patriarchy” and the Collapse of Modern Civilization

*Claudia von Werlhof**

The “Critical Theory of Patriarchy”—an Alternative to the Modern Scientific Logic of Domination and Transformation

Originating in a systematic and far-reaching process of reflection about modern civilization undertaken approximately 35 years ago, the “critical theory of patriarchy” yields an entirely new view of modernity in its many crises, and what can be deemed its fundamental failure (Projektgruppe 2009, 2011; von Werlhof 2012a).

These reflections arose from unease with the blatant contradiction between academic theory and reality. This contradiction was above all apparent when addressing the situation facing women and the people in the so-called Third World, the world-system’s South. It is no coincidence that the critique of modernity as “one capitalist patriarchal world” has its origins in years of empirical research in the South, as well as into the lives of women, peasants, and other marginalized groups. We are not dealing with three worlds, that is to say, one that is “capitalist,” one “socialist,” and one “feudal,” but rather one world constituting a single system (cf. Wallerstein 1979).

In the process of developing a new understanding of the world-system, it was necessary to realize that the “housewife-ization” of women—their essential situation as an unpaid labor force, starkly different from that of wage-earning, “proletarianized” men—is not a case of continuing underdevelopment (defined as “non-capitalist” labor beyond capitalist wage labor). Rather, it is the result of their pivotal—if unrecognized—contribution to world-systemic capital accumulation (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1981; von Werlhof, Mies, and Bennholdt-Thomsen 1988; Mies 1986). This turning of women into “housewives” results from the European witch trials (Federici 2004); a campaign of subjugation that lasted several hundred years constituting an “internal colonization” in parallel with that of the peasantry and international colonialism as “external” to Europe. It provided the original decisive

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basis for capital accumulation, as well as for the primitive accumulation that continues to this day. This international and gender-specific situation was completely unrecognized 35 years ago (and matters have not improved much since then). It was therefore clear to us that we should develop our thought along these lines and in all possible directions.

From this point of view, systematic perversion of the world (von Werlhof 1985, 2011a) must be exposed and posed as a fact before all of its dimensions can be recognized. Once this is accomplished, a process of reversion, a flipping of knowledge from its head onto its feet, can begin.

An *interdisciplinary approach* has proven necessary for the development of the critical theory of patriarchy, allowing for the emergence of a new, far-reaching, and inclusive paradigm that transcends both the modern world view and that of the premodern world, insofar as it was patriarchal in character, and therefore part of the perversion syndrome.

A fresh, broader, concretely applicable, and historically periodized *concept of patriarchy* arose from this interdisciplinary undertaking; one that incorporated the neglected and “forgotten” 1970s and 1980s critique of modern technology (Wagner 1970; Genth 2002). An initial critical history of technology under patriarchy was formulated (von Werlhof 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b) using the concept of “alchemy” (Eliade 1980; Gebelein 1991; Schütt 2000). This research made it possible to define patriarchy as a bellicose, religiously legitimized, and utopically motivated *project of “creation by destruction”* that attempts to usurp the products of mothers and of “Mother Nature.” This project, particularly in the universal form of modern “progress,” is not simply one of domination; it is a world-transforming project. Furthermore, it is not, as its major claim has it, a project for world improvement, but a force for world destruction.

Obviously, such a result, which makes the logic of modernity’s patriarchal civilization one of *failure*, remains virtually inconceivable and unspeakable. Hence, we cannot expect a warm reception for the critical theory of patriarchy (Projektgruppe 2011). On the contrary, following a phase of disavowal and derision, it is entering a period in which it will also be combated—before, one hopes, it is recognized as a new systematic explanation for the many current, and now global, crises and the obvious onset of the collapse of modern civilization.

The development of the critical theory of patriarchy makes it clear why, its research topic aside (patriarchy in all of its manifestations), its ultimate goal is the presentation of an alternative to patriarchal society and civilization (Projektgruppe 2009, 2011). To achieve clarity in this regard, it was necessary to establish a connection with the *modern matriarchy research* that had arisen concurrently (Göttner-Abendroth 1988, 2009). This facilitated a comparison between patriarchal and nonpatriarchal civilization as the two extremes of continuum mapping of the

civilizations known to have existed to date. This distinction is best measured by contrasting the overall life-affirming and egalitarian nature of historical matriarchal societies with the fundamental hostility to life and the forms of domination found in all patriarchies (Genth 1996). Today—from this point of view—it may not yet be possible to “see” more than this. Perhaps, in the future other conceptual possibilities will become apparent. For now, however, the critical theory of patriarchy clarifies how and why we have arrived at a systemic, all-encompassing crisis of the civilization of modernity as the latest stage in the particularly rapid development of patriarchy over the past 500 years. It also elucidates the resultant drastic acceleration of planetary destruction. For the first time, we are faced with the veritable collapse of modernity in the form of “capitalist patriarchy,” and with it the eventual collapse of patriarchal civilization as such.

Considering *alternatives to modernity* is arguably the major taboo in the global North. As long as no concept of patriarchy that addresses the “deep structure” of *modernity* is acknowledged, particularly as regards the dramatic perversion of the world (view) over not only the last 500, but the last 5000 years, the coming collapse will not be comprehensible, despite being an object of unquestionable immediate experience.

In reality, there is no such awareness anywhere in the academic world, the political world, or social movements (apart from sections of the indigenous movements), much less this sort of concept of patriarchy is not even among those who otherwise offer a broad critique of modern conditions. To some degree, most theorists cannot see the forest for the trees. Widespread “specialization” prevents us from seeing the natural, scientific, and rationalistic background of all academic disciplines (Genth 2002). The result is a lack of consideration of the fundamental conditions that shape our lives, both concurrently and in their genesis. The relationship of patriarchal civilization to politics, gender, intergenerational change, as well as to nature in all of its economic, technological, and spiritual–religious dimensions, goes largely unexamined (cf. Mies and Shiva 1993). There seems to be a(n) (un)conscious denial at work here. For if patriarchy today constitutes what Jung called the “collective unconscious” (1995; Erdheim 1984), or decisively shapes it, then it will be no easy matter to set it aside. Indeed, this may only occur when it is “too late”—by the time the collapse of patriarchal civilization has touched everything, making it impossible to continue living in the same way, or even destroying the “most basic requirements for life” (Behmann 2009, 108).

Both a critique of modernity as a capitalist patriarchy and the development of an alternative *beyond modernity*, indeed, beyond patriarchy altogether, are things the majority in the North cannot yet stomach. For them, that is too much. They “refuse” to go down this challenging path, even in pursuance and consideration of their own themes, approaches, and interests. It is no accident that the concepts of matriarchy and patriarchy often elicit resistance because they call into question everything that appears normal today (My Hanh Derungs 2011).

If those who are at the absolute bottom of this system recognize themselves in what is being said here, then it can be said to provide a viable insight. In reality, we, along with many women everywhere, feel much closer to “indigenous” people and to the people of the South than we do to our own neighbors because we in the West are generally more alienated from matriarchal traditions and wisdom than anyone else in the world. However, even here, in “ancient Europe” (Gimbutas), an indigenous matriarchal culture once existed.

That the sciences still have little interest in this “truth of the time” means that they continue to exclusively represent ruling knowledge, that is to say, the knowledge benefiting the ruling class—the Occupy movement’s “1%.”

Regarding alchemy—“Modern Alchemy” as the guiding concept of the critical theory of patriarchy

Wisdom, goddesses, and certain types of stones—motifs in the alchemy of antiquity (Schütt 2000; von Werlhof 2011b, 2012b)—are rarely discussed in today’s natural sciences. However, as during the days of early patriarchy, the “higher being” must be produced, and a technique or all-powerful means, albeit no longer known as the “philosophers’ stone,” is consistently sought in all spheres of social activity as the “theory of everything”:

- In economics (Marx 1974a; Jaeger 2008; Binswanger 1985), gold/money/capital, machinery, and commodities serve as the higher being or the “philosopher’s stone” that will bring about the immediate transformation (or destruction) of the allegedly lower substance/nature, and its replacement by its opposite;
- In colonial and other politics, in state and war, as well as in science and machine technology, the *method* of dividing, transforming/rebuilding and dominating, i.e., “continuous primitive accumulation,” serves as a method of violent separation—the alchemistic “mortification”—and restructuring—the “magnum opus”—thereby determining the general conditions of social organization and social action;
- In *metaphysics*, patriarchal belief systems and religion(s). For example, Jesus Christ as the “stone” (Christus Lapis, cf. Jung 1994), who through his alchemical death and rebirth as the “higher body” allegedly “delivered the believers from evil” for all time. Specifically, this took the form of liberation from the “lower nature” of the body, so that the human as believer/Christian was (or could be) freed from all possible guilt, e.g. with respect to life, the body, and the world through the sacraments as alchemical means.

Examples of alchemical procedures can be found at the *social-institutional* level, beginning with the inquisition and the modern institutions based upon it (Kimmerle

1980; Federici 2004). The justice system, the police, the prison system, the medical profession and the hospital, the nuclear family, schools, the bureaucracy, the factory, the army, and so on would destroy/“mortify” “commonness” (commonality) and “conviviality” (Illich 2006), that is to say, social cohesiveness and old forms of “mutuality” and solidarity, affecting them negatively at the point where the dividing of people and the undermining of solidarity between people as “individuals” occurs. Equally numerous are the examples of alchemical procedures that can be found at the *technological* level. They include modern machine technology (Genth 2002) and the destructive capacity of the military–industrial complex, “nuclear alchemy” (Wagner 1970; Easlea 1987; Caldicott 2002) and the new “military alchemy” (von Werlhof 2011b, 343), modern medical techniques (Bergmann 2004), pharmaceutical products, the new biotechnologies used by the “life sciences,” particularly “synthetic biology” (Posener 2010), “algeny” (Rifkin 1983), gene and reproductive technologies (M. Wolf 2008; von Werlhof 2010b), as well as nanotechnology (Schirmacher 2001) and artificial intelligence with artificial, “post-human” life forms, robotniks (Weizenbaum 1978), based on the destructive transformation of living matter and the natural world in general (Chargaff 1988). At the *religious* level, alchemical procedures include the Christian sacraments based on “Christus Lapis” as the precondition for “Transubstantiation” during the Eucharist that will allegedly free believers from “evil” and “sin,” in effect, the use of quasi-“black magical” wisdom that repeatedly confirms “oblivion,” and extinguishes the interconnection between all beings and the “Great Mother/Goddess,” or “Mother Nature.” The result is that the true “evil” of personal participation in the alchemical destruction and transformation projects targeting life, the body, and the earth is no longer recognized, much less understood and abandoned.

The modern alchemical procedures enumerated above promise the same thing as ancient alchemy: wealth, splendor, and gold in abundance; military victory, technological superiority, control, mastery of people (particularly women) and nature through a transformation into something “higher”—eternal youth, beauty, power, good health, long life, and even immortality; the good, the true, and the beautiful for everyone—the allegedly better, more perfect, more complete, guilt-free, fully developed “new man.” A key focus includes as much as a “trans-human” replacement, which, like Paracelsus’ “Homunculus,” will come out of a test tube; or like the posthuman super-robot, he will no longer be “biological,” but rather an entirely artificial, predetermined, and manufactured “life” form (Duden 1991). As such, it will not involve any contribution from women, mothers, bodies, wombs, or other formerly required cultural or natural conditions, such as cycles and rhythms, nor the different forms of interconnectedness and self-creative processes—forms of “natura naturans”—that these give rise to.

This abstraction from a vivid, self-creative nature has resulted in fantasies and practices of a *pure patriarchal alchemy* totally lacking in hindsight! My claim is that:

in the modern era, alchemy is no longer only the concern of a tiny and elite minority, but rather has simultaneously become a universal procedure and big business, both in times of war and in times of “peace,” with the result that peace as such is no longer an option.

Modern alchemy manifests itself as “weaponization” (Phillips 2012), i.e., a process by which the steadily increasing *armed nature* of capital, money, machinery, commodities, institutions, belief systems, and individual/collective patterns of behavior becomes increasingly universalized. The “advantages” of this renewed and increasingly *militarized alchemy* are largely restricted to the ruling class. As in ancient alchemy, the new “creator,” “deleter,” and innovator eventually receives a higher status and an acknowledged “higher state of being” for his accomplishments. However, these benefits have proven themselves to be a boomerang: even the victor’s part of this “brave new world” has become a war zone (Wittenborn 2003; Grossman 1996).

The factors leading to the collapse of modernity are now legion and so breathtakingly obvious that people everywhere should have long ago begun to panic. This is largely not the case because the project of modernity and its logic, as well as its overall consequences, have not been *accurately and cohesively presented* by its proponents *and are not (meant to be) “truly” understood by the general public*. This project’s goals and the violent disorder it entails are, in any case, perceived by the majority to be “normal” and “eternal.” Its advocates have no interest in a generalized, altered perception of this project, by and off, of which they have lived and profited, and/or with which they have gained power or still hope to do so. For those “at the top,” nothing short of actual world domination is acceptable! Still, this final crisis of Western civilization, the collapse of its global project, has become apparent, even “palpable,” even in areas where it cannot be “measured.” It hangs there like an ubiquitous, sprawling, novel sort of *unease*, a deep insecurity about both the social and the natural order.

The “Alchemists’ Civilization”—In its final stages (and) with no alternative?

It has become obvious that modern civilization has been destroying the world, rather than building the purported better world and higher civilization. From the point of view of the “99%,” modernity as the utopian project for building a “better world” has reached the point of exhaustion. It must be rapidly superseded by a new civilization of an entirely different character. Clearly, “the alchemists’ civilization” designation is not only “unacknowledged” by modernity, but completely unknown, and would indeed be greeted by many with an uncomprehending shake of the head, or even provoke serious resistance. Such a concept would knock up against taboos, some ancient, others modern, and all-encompassing and unspeakable unconscious perceptions that have been consistently repressed and treated as uncircumventable. As a result, possible options go unperceived and are both theoretically and practically

sidestepped, even though they have long existed on the social margins in a precarious and fragmentary way (Projektgruppe 2009, 2011).

The “Great Transformation” of the world, which in the modern era has taken on an all-encompassing and cataclysmic form (Polanyi 1978; Jaeger 2008), is based on cumulative technological, military, economic, and political experience, on objectives and working hypotheses that stretch back many thousands of years, and on the more recent history of patriarchy, which ensured the *continuity* of this development. The extremely diverse extensive and regional variations in this development in the modern era, or more precisely, within modernity, which is to say for approximately the last 200 years, have constituted a far-reaching *break* within this project. This break is not, however, a break with the “alchemical” project as such, but—on the contrary—with the obstacles that continue to stand in its way; it facilitated the *establishment of a modern, “purely” patriarchal-alchemical core project in Europe. This project has been in play since the emergence of patriarchy* and has failed repeatedly over hundreds, indeed thousands of years insofar as its broad, practical application goes.

The alchemical project was and is utopian, irrational, illusory, idealistic, and based on a conception of the hereafter. It is hubristic and delusional, unrealizable under earthly conditions despite, and because of, its (anti-material) “materialism.” The transformation of the world/nature into another, allegedly “higher,” “more noble,” and “better” second nature (Bruiger 2006) or “supernature,” has been alchemy’s central objective since its patriarchalization in antiquity. It is an attempt to “create” or artificially produce matter, beings, and existence itself. In conclusion, Alchemy has become a patriarchal procreation theory and practice which aims at functioning *beyond* natural reality and natural cycles, thereby aspiring to an overall independence from nature as such. The related projects and undertakings have nonetheless been and are presented as absolutely “rational”. This patriarchal understanding of reason has existed since antiquity, and in principle remains unchanged today (Kimmerle 1980; Behmann 2011). Designating modern civilization as “alchemical” refers as much to the *deep historical dimension* of the phenomenon as to its inevitable *failure*.

It is my thesis that modernity and the machine have in no way signaled a parting of the ways with alchemy, as is generally claimed (Schütt 2000). Quite to the contrary, the *implementation of the fundamental methodic principles of alchemy, “division, transformation, and domination,”* and of the programmatic surmounting of what was previously known as the “*secrets of matter,*” which have been systematically established in almost all areas of social life, for the first time make alchemy possible, if in a merely transitory and imaginary way. The fundamental problem facing alchemy in all of its patriarchal forms becomes obvious: the secrets of matter have simply been pushed aside and ignored.

This “alternate view” of our civilization is, however, only possible with the help of our new and expanded concept of patriarchy. Only with an analytical and critical

perspective on patriarchy is it even possible to understand this alchemy, which continues to puzzle even its contemporary proponents. It is necessary to recognize that the incredible proliferation of alchemy as “science,” as well as its ambivalences and its as yet unresolved or entirely undetected internal contradictions, are the result of its historical development. As such, they arise as much from patriarchy’s inconsistencies and incongruities as from the scope of its social order.

The development of alchemy, originally called, among other things, “black Nile mud,” (named after the cyclical inundations by the Nile “black country of the moon” in pre-pharaoh Egypt), began as a garden-civilization within *matriarchal* civilization, (D. Wolf 1994). Alchemy as such was not the invention of matriarchal, not patriarchal civilization. When patriarchy takes over something from matriarchal civilization, it usurps it, transforms it, destroys it, abolishes it, denies it, and/or perverts it into its opposite (von Werlhof 2011b). Patriarchal civilization is essentially an inversion of matriarchal civilization, given that the genuine patriarchal inventions of violence, war, and domination are all taboos in matriarchal civilization (Göttner-Abendroth 1988, 2009). When alchemy developed its patriarchal character, it was transformed into its opposite.

The military conquest of matriarchal civilizations (D. Wolf 1994; Gimbutas 1991; Dieckvoss 2003) by armed invaders from the North and, thereafter, the East and the West, set in motion the “patriarchalization” of the plundered societies, and with that of alchemy itself. That marked the beginning of an age in which nature—along with mothers and women—tended to be defined as an enemy. Nonetheless, the widespread patriarchal alchemy of antiquity still defined itself in part in connection with the pre-patriarchal “sciences,” technologies, and cultures, as in the example of shamanism that had existed for tens of thousands of years, in “*illud tempus*” (Schütt 2000, 540f), the far distant origin point of matriarchal civilizations.

It makes sense to apply a “periodized” perspective to alchemy. The new, patriarchal sections clearly initially grew out of an older, matriarchal variety. As a result, a distinction can be drawn between a matriarchal alchemy, a mixed quasi-“matriarchal”-patriarchal alchemy, and a purely patriarchal alchemy. We know relatively little about the first of these because it left no records of its own, although it has left behind some partial traditions—not least of all in the matriarchies still thriving throughout the world; good examples can be found in shamanism, healing arts, horticulture and agriculture, particular ways of handling food, sexuality, pregnancy and motherhood, ancestor worship, astronomy/astrology, women’s practice of *Vāmācāra*,¹ as well as Tantrism, Taoism, magic, plant alchemy/alchemy with animal material/water alchemy, ritual gold, silver, and copper processing, textile and jewelry manufacturing.

¹From the Sanskrit “*vāmā*,” woman, and “*ācāra*,” ritual practice (Chattopadhyaya 1959, 278).

The “mixed” alchemy found in diverse variations across the world from antiquity to early modern times has failed as well. It is my thesis that it is not its matriarchal component but its Western and primarily patriarchal component that precipitated its collapse; the result of “struggling with the secrets of matter” so as to “manipulate matter into a higher essence” (Schütt 2000, 12). In turn, the “purely” patriarchal alchemy of modernity must certainly fail once it has eliminated all of the matriarchal remnants, becoming so “successful” that it precipitously plunges the entire globe into an unprecedented crisis.

As noted, almost no one has noticed that the seemingly obvious goal of manipulating matter to a supposedly higher essence is typically patriarchal and incompatible with the matriarchal side of alchemy. Rather than defining this goal as patriarchal and contradictory to known alternatives, it is treated as universal and neutral. The prevalent and essentially unchallenged impression in the literature about alchemy is that alchemy has not failed on its quest of transformation. It is not the goal itself that was rejected, only its formulation. It was in no way understood as illusory or violent. As a result, it does not appear that alchemy failed, but rather that it collapsed because of the allegedly idiosyncratic irrationality of its worldview and methods—a tangle of “superstition,” “magic,” “mysticism,” values, teleologies, fear of taboos, religious redemption, the subjective, unverifiable, and unrepeatable procedures, lack of abstraction, the focus on limitless connections, the stress placed upon qualities, only apparent successes, and “cosmologies” (Schütt 2000, 538f).

The qualitative efforts of premodern alchemy, today commonly defined as “irrational,” are based in part on its matriarchal past and seen as irrational only from a patriarchal and expressly modern point of view. Premodern alchemy has been reshaped and deformed by patriarchy, and is therefore irrational from both a matriarchal and a modern perspective. However, alchemy has not failed on account of these forms of alleged irrationality. The latter simply neither facilitated attempts to manipulate matter nor efforts to produce a “higher essence;” their purpose was only to delineate a worldview/worldly wisdom/theory for the appropriate handling of matter. Patriarchal procreation *outside* of nature, natural cycles, and the womb, as well as the “creation” of gold and life, which alchemy has failed to achieve, does not belong to its matriarchal side. From a matriarchal point of view, it is these things that are “irrational!”

My claim is that the problems inherent in integrating the patriarchal aspects of alchemy—the goal of successfully manipulating matter in particular—have gone unnoted in the modern era. Instead, it is argued that all irrationalities have been eliminated *in order to move beyond pre-modern alchemy, which is explicitly defined as a failure. The aspects of alchemy that have failed, the patriarchal aspects, have now been fully incorporated, and are treated as self-evidently valid!* Meanwhile, the modern patriarchal world-system as a “civilization of alchemists” is based on the successful “thorough patriarchalization” of alchemy in the modern era and in modernity, i.e., the cleansing of its core of all qualitative connections considered superfluous or judged to be embellishments, in particular its matriarchal roots. What is now clear is that modern (natural) science, politics, technology, religion, and economics, as the

interdisciplinary but unrecognized patriarchal alchemy of modernity, are unacceptable and offer nothing in the way of a project for the future. There must be an awakening from the patriarchal delusion of being able to supplant the world with its opposite, a process that is clearly destroying it.

On the limits of modernity as the “Alchemical System of Capitalist Patriarchy”

The end of the West!

Modernity, the Western civilization, has reached its end. No renewed “Go West” is possible. The promised paradise on earth has largely vanished. Catastrophic conditions in every sphere of life become more widespread daily and/or are being actively spread. What is occurring is the opposite of the goal that has been consistently predicted and propagated. What now? A great confusion rules the day worldwide. Such a development was never anticipated. It seems inexplicable. Even economic and political analysts, left and right, who define the current condition as a “crisis,” are at their wits’ end. Meanwhile, everything suggests that, with globalization and neoliberalism as their economic and war policies, the world’s true powers have arrived at their conclusion: they will use all necessary means to prop up modernity’s “alchemical” transformation project for as long as possible—for their exclusive profit and in public denial about the nature of processes involved. With this, the democratic façade comes off, showing the face of an ever-cruder *neo-totalitarian tendency*. The ideological rationalizations will seem increasingly incredible. For the majority of people, however, there is as yet no alternative in sight (von Werlhof 2010a).

Using the comprehensive paradigm provided by the critical theory of patriarchy, which can be understood as a *meta-theory for the 21st century*, the mystery of our social order and its deep historical structure, reaching back to the origins of patriarchy, and the current decadence it gave rise to, can be unraveled. As a world-system, modern capitalist patriarchy is a war-system, resting on a patriarchally oriented, alchemically-based “creation by destruction” with the goal of establishing a counter-nature and a counter-world that will allegedly *transform and supersede* the existing nature and world with ones that are of a higher and better order. This project has clearly arrived at its absolute limit, i.e., at the limit set by the ecology of the planet itself. It is necessary, however, to understand the *logic of this failure*, while simultaneously presenting a logic that opens an *avenue of escape* from the crisis of modern civilization and elucidates alternatives.

The dimensions of the crisis of patriarchal civilization and the responses to it

It is the very real crisis of Western civilization (which includes the East) that lies behind the much discussed and multifaceted crisis that has spread synergistically into

all areas of life across the world. The *utopia* of the modern era, with its claim of steady progress toward an allegedly “better” and “higher” life for everyone, for all time, and throughout the world, has become the exact opposite—a *dystopia*: *instead of heaven the result is hell on earth* (cf. Jaeger 2008). Science and politics can offer no cohesive response, neither on a material or conceptual levels, nor on the levels of the physical–bodily or spiritual–psychic. In fact, any attempt to do so would unmask the absurdity of today’s science and politics. Instead, things are to continue as if all that is at issue is an economic downturn or a temporary breakdown that the system can correct.

This will not prove to be the case. It is apparent that the difficulties being treated as a crisis are largely irreversible, and with a seemingly unstoppable systemic drive have begun to synergistically and reciprocally intensify, becoming increasingly deadly for increasing numbers of people, cultures, regions, animals, and plants, and even for planetary climate and planet earth itself (Bertell 2011). The current crisis has thus assumed unprecedented dimensions. Neoliberalism’s globalization, a form of politics that serves the interests of transnational corporations, particularly as they have recently operated, only accelerates the crisis. These politics lead both to an accelerated consumption of the planet and to a greater incidence of direct war (Mies 2004), with hundreds of war zones, both small and large, throughout the world. The specific aim is to secure, divvy up, and ship out the last of the planet’s resources—in the form of a *geo-colonial war*. Most of these resources are scarce and will soon run out, and in spite of the feverish work with “new technologies,” there are, in general, no replacements in sight.

The industrialization that underlies the promises of Western modernity was primarily based on the use of these so-called natural resources. Without them, modern civilization ceases to exist. That the project of the modern era objectively comes to an end for the majority, even if, come hell or high water, alternatives are being sought in the “life industries” and through gene and nanotechnologies (Schirmmacher 2001), is something that cannot yet be openly thought or said. It is a taboo that, if broken, would call into question the established and generally well-heeled mass consensus that spans the spectrum from the left to the right. That at this point the so-called resources are largely exhausted makes it clear that progress can no longer be for everyone. The powerful are now attempting to secure the available resources for themselves alone. It is also clear that most people’s very survival is and will be under attack, either because they are deprived of the resources necessary for an “advanced” lifestyle, or even of the necessities required for a life in the interstices of the system. So, the question arises: has global industrial mass society, with its mass consensus, mass production, and mass consumption, not already made the *transition to mass death*, indeed, even to the mass murder that began long ago on its periphery (Ziegler 2004, 2005)?

At that, the main justifications for modern industry, technology, science, and politics collapse the world over, which is to say, it’s purported “democracy” and its alleged capacity for “unlimited” global productivity. Those who have championed this project and made sacrifices for it must ask themselves whether they have not

been hoodwinked. Without the promise of unlimited resources and their “productive” processing, as well as an ultimately just distribution among all those who have worked to advance this project, they certainly would not have willingly participated. They would not have participated if they had known that their work would only serve to plunder the entire natural world; that it would prop up its allegedly “productive” transformation into commodities, money, and machinery—in short, into capital, with its accompanying authority, and would only lead to waste and destruction. In the end, not much will remain, least of all the earth, which has already begun to be “as uninhabitable as the moon,” while capital, as the new form of affluence and power as world domination, is hoarded by those at the top. Accumulated capital is increasingly worthless (the Midas problem) without access to sufficient concrete matter, that is, if it lacks access to nature, life, and the so-called “resources” in adequate quantities. This became obvious when the “limits to growth” could no longer be denied. The source of these limits is the heretofore “*unrecognized core of the crisis*” (von Werlhof 2012b)!

The “sacred cow” of modern “production” is emerging today as an ongoing and systematic *destruction*. The established struggle for production amounts to a destructive battle against people and nature. Only those at the top, and occasionally those in the middle, the so-called middle classes, have profited from this formally undeclared war. For those at the bottom, generally speaking women and the people of the world-system’s periphery, who had been convinced that they were “next in line,” there is little or nothing left, and what remains is in ruins (“kaputtalism”) and/or valueless: you cannot eat money. Furthermore, it constantly “evaporates;” capital is dead, “congealed,” past labor (Marx 1974a), the product of “creation by destruction.” In the final analysis, it cannot give rise to anything, even if compound interest makes it appear otherwise.

It has become clear that the democratic gestures of those at the top were only meant to keep the masses in check. It was a ploy. Ultimately, the alchemical transformation of humans and nature into capital would be impossible without the *creation and organized appearance of the masses, including a worldwide “reserve army”* at the (relative) periphery—it constitutes nothing short of a “population policy,” Marx’s “law of capital accumulation” (1974b). Therefore, democracy, or “socialism”—politically conceived in different ways—have been no more than the organization of general *participation* in this project, and so the inverse of delegating power to the people; the people had their potential power delegated to those at the top. Such has been and continues to be the nature of both contemporary liberal democracy and contemporary socialism.

The question now is: How long have “those at the top” believed that infinite, all-encompassing, and eternal “production” was possible? Never? Otherwise, since when have they known that the project would prove impractical in the long run? And when did they decide—secretly, mind you—to abandon this project (Gray 1998)? Did this decision underlie the shift to neoliberalism?

The response to the crisis will indicate the seriousness to the claims of a real democracy. Was it only a matter of persuading the masses formed and concentrated for the purposes of capital's project, its "creation by destruction," to devote their labor to its realization, or was it also a matter of really letting them (when, who, and for how long) participate? Values of the bourgeois revolution like freedom, equality, and fraternity, and the so-called "human rights," have, in any case, led the masses to believe that the general applicability of such rights would extend to them as well. They identified with them and were manipulated by them, although these values, as with money, were only intended for the "elites." Indeed, the mass organizations, parties, and unions, and an increasing number of women have drawn the conclusion that what is good for those at the top is also good for those below! What, however, is the limit of this apparent calculation—e.g., with regard to those "below," that is to say, women and the South—and what is intended when this project reaches its end?

If the crisis of modernity and the horror of its manifestations and outcomes were taken seriously, and if the democratic promises were taken at face value, this would logically lead to new international, collectively conceived and conducted *economics, technology, science, and politics that are no longer alchemical in orientation*. They would be profoundly different from what exists today, representing a real *alternative to modernity*, rather than another expression of it. The modern era must be seen as a fundamental and grave *delusion* and *deadly aberration* for the majority, for nature, and for the planet. Instead, among today's critics, we find champions of a "green," or even a "positive" capitalism and new initiatives for "modernity based on solidarity"—as if that could provide salvation, or even redemption for their propagandistic and populist promises! We will see who still believes in "progress and democracy" under the current conditions. Those who fail to "see" that modernity as such was the wrong approach and "method," the wrong way to go (*methodos* = the way), and has now arrived at its objective endpoint for the world's majority, do so based on their personal interests, their beliefs, or a lack of direct, personal concern.

Those at the top have already decided *not* to act against the system (absolutely apparent given the way the 2008 financial crisis was dealt with and in today's attempt to use the ESM² to establish a financial dictatorship in the European Union), but *completely consciously* and for as long as possible to act *only* in the interests of those at the system's apex, who are responsible for this crisis, its wars, collapse, deprivation, famines, and misery, thereby earning a great deal of money—more than ever before. I call it the "great engorgement": it is paradise for the very few, the "1%." Their motto: We want it all for ourselves!

²The European Stabilization Mechanism, a Luxembourg-based organization established in September 2012, and tasked with providing "assistance" to Eurozone member states facing financial difficulties; a process that entails extracting huge—in the long run, unlimited—sums of money from both ordinary people and the public sector for international banks and financial markets.

Obviously everything was for us! Did you really believe that we meant you as well? We profited from the destruction of the earth. For that, we needed you. You participated, because you wanted your piece of the pie. Why didn't you safeguard the earth instead? It's your own fault....

This kind of scorn is already in the air. It heralds a new and this time global fascism, totalitarianism, or “N\$,³” compared to which the earlier ones were amateurish. This time, the process clearly involves everything—at a global level. In the final analysis, the “New World Order” (NWO) is on the horizon, regardless of who chooses to participate in its gestation; it is a *death knell for the masses*.

The conservative German politician, Gauweiler⁴ denounced “aid” for Greece during a ZDF⁵ TV interview on 5 July 2011: “The money isn't for the Greeks, it's for investment funds!” He thereby let the cat out of the bag: at issue is the organized and “voluntary,” authorized *plundering of Europe* by the global financial mafia, and not an economic policy favoring those who suffered the negative effects of the recent use of public funds to rescue finance capital in the wake of 2008! It is the dawn of the system's *criminal phase* International policy is an increasingly dictatorial and totalitarian terrorism from above. The possibility of mass death is consciously accepted, indeed, even directly provoked—witness the starvation, refugee misery, wars, illness and contagion from manmade “natural” disasters, and more (Mies 2004; Bertell 2011; Ziegler 2004). What is new about this is the *megadimensions* of the problem, which for the first time is planetary in scope, and might prove to be the last problem we will ever face. Afterward, it will perhaps be, to quote Günther Anders, “as if we never existed” (1981; cf. PBME 2012). The economic and technological *means of mass destruction* available today are historically unprecedented, and the current crisis cannot be compared to any of the past crises with their military “solutions” (Bertell 2011). As mentioned, it cannot be sidestepped by another “Go West”—which is to say, by the occupation of new colonies. That also applies to any new “Go East,” specifically, the effort to annex the world-system's East and its “resources.” This approach brings with it the threat of a Third World War (Chossudovsky 2012), insofar as it can be said not to have already begun. In the end, it is the cherished belief of a few “insiders” that, out of reach of the world's population, the “1%” have secretly developed and secured new technologies for their own exclusive use and to meet their needs alone (Bearden [1986] 2002), which is why they are not concerned about the consequences of the crisis.

³National Dollarism.

⁴Peter Gauweiler, A Bavarian Christian Socialist Union member of the Bundestag, and the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Foreign Cultural and Educational Policies for the Foreign Affairs Committee.

⁵Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (Second German Television) is a public-service broadcaster based in Mainz, Germany.

Interpretation, consequences, and the way out

The critical theory of patriarchy provides us with an explanation for the emergence, development, and perils of the global crisis of civilization, as well as a way out. It allows us to elucidate why

modernity is the most radical and violent project of civilization, one which we describe as patriarchy, and which now—in the phase of “capitalist” patriarchy as an “alchemical system”—in the face of the outcome of its policies, is clearly prepared to assume the most brutal of consequences, but is not prepared to concede that the project has failed.

The modern era and modernity have had such a destructive effect that in only one to two centuries they have reduced the planet as a whole to a perilous state (Bertell 2011). The critical theory of patriarchy makes it possible for the first time to see the absurdity of the spell or the religion of scientific–technological and economic progress in the form of a *modernized and generalized, all-encompassing, bellicose alchemy*. And our new approach shows how modern alchemy’s utopian project of destruction in the service of the so-called “creation,” leads to the fetishization of results, commodities, money, and the “machine” as an allegedly better and higher man-made “life” form. *The patriarchal project, based on and arising from a belief in violence and war, is the key source of the dilemma that Western civilization faces today.*

What has been destroyed is irreplaceable—most of the so-called “resources” are non-renewable, the basis of their renewal is beginning to disappear (e.g., fresh water), or else the “replacement” consists of something that is literally the opposite of what is being replaced, something dead, something that has been killed. The hubris and the delusional, “Gnostic” (which is to say, anti-earth and world shunning) nihilism of Western civilization with respect to the planet and all life has become the general trend and the daily reality of most people.

The logic of the end of modernity has its counterpart in the logic of alternatives. It is a given that these must be matriarchal, not capitalist (socialist) or patriarchal. “Matriarchal” does not mean dominated by women; it means free of domination, life-sustaining, and egalitarian, with a view of nature as a living entity. It also connotes the interconnectedness of all beings and the goal of a universally acceptable economic common ground, a shared social–political organization, and a culture committed to a peaceful conflict resolution. The civilizing conditions formulated here would be completely different from, indeed the inverse of, patriarchal conditions. Human beings lived for a much longer time under such conditions than they have under patriarchy, but never in such great numbers. As a result, we must now create something entirely new to facilitate the transition to a new civilization (Shiva 2008; Akhter 2011; Esteva 2011, Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1997; von Werlhof, Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Faraclas 2001; Medina 2010). There is no precedent for the development of a matriarchal civilization out of patriarchy, or of an indigenous civilization out of modernity, such that would permit the survival of more than a minority.

The capitalist (as well as socialist) patriarchy of the modern world-system is only the *tip of this historical iceberg*. Until now, the nature of the submerged world that supports this tip has remained hidden: it is the integral development of and into patriarchy, the process of patriarchalization that constitutes the heretofore largely invisible component of today's world-system. A livable, child-, women-, and nature-friendly matriarchy as "second culture" (Genth 1996) is developing, and to some degree already or still exists on the social margins, but the forces actively favoring its near-final liquidation operate everywhere.

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