

Soyons realistes, demandons l'impossible. Alternative futures beyond 'peak capitalism'

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The fetish world of capitalism

**Many more people can easily imagine climate collapse.....
than the end of capitalism**

People are “ blind vis-à-vis the apocalypse’ and are
‘more afraid of losing their jobs today than of losing
tomorrow’s existence and the world the day after


Günther Anders 1989, Antiquatedness of Man

“The daily, inevitable, inescapable transformation of all
tangible values into intangible, interchangeable
categories such as commodity, money, price and wage
has changed the spiritual life of Man in capitalism
completely”

Ernst Bornemann 1973, Psychoanalyse des Geldes. Eine kritische Untersuchung


The double character of all economic processes in capitalism

use values: the „true richness“ (K.Marx)

- created by human labour + presented by nature
 - determined by their benefit for the satisfaction of human needs
 - involves a **qualitative transformation** of matter + energy
 - **irreversible** consequences
 - **kumulativ effects**
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Insurmountable limits of nature at the „input“- and „out-side“ of capitalism as a world economic and world-ecological system

(exchange) values: „the wealth of nations“ (A. Smith)

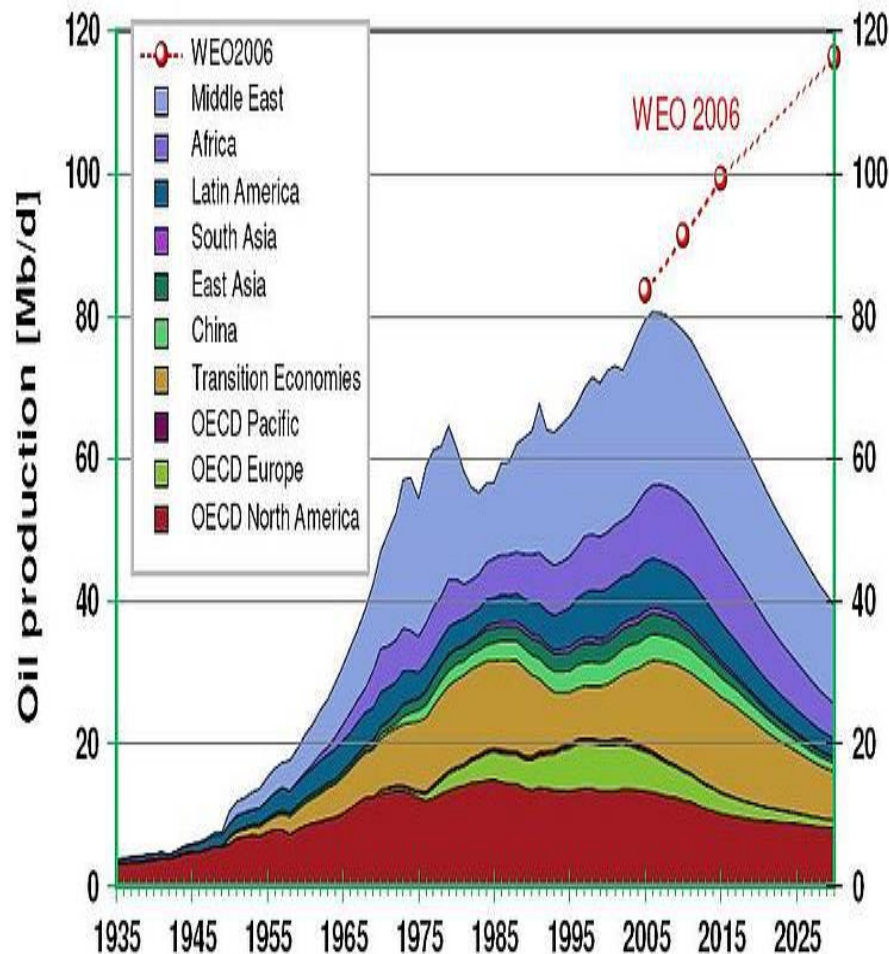
- created by wage labour – with machinery mostly run by fossil energy + short-term exploitation and squandering of the power of the earth
 - based on „commodification“ of everything + aim of profit making
 - measured in monetary terms – criterium: **quantitative increase**
 - **reversibility** of valorization: $M-C-M'$
 - internal contradictions + **cyclical crisis**
- 

Possible for capital to profit from ruthless extraction of natural riches indefinitely - but due ecological degradation human civilisation will likely no longer exist

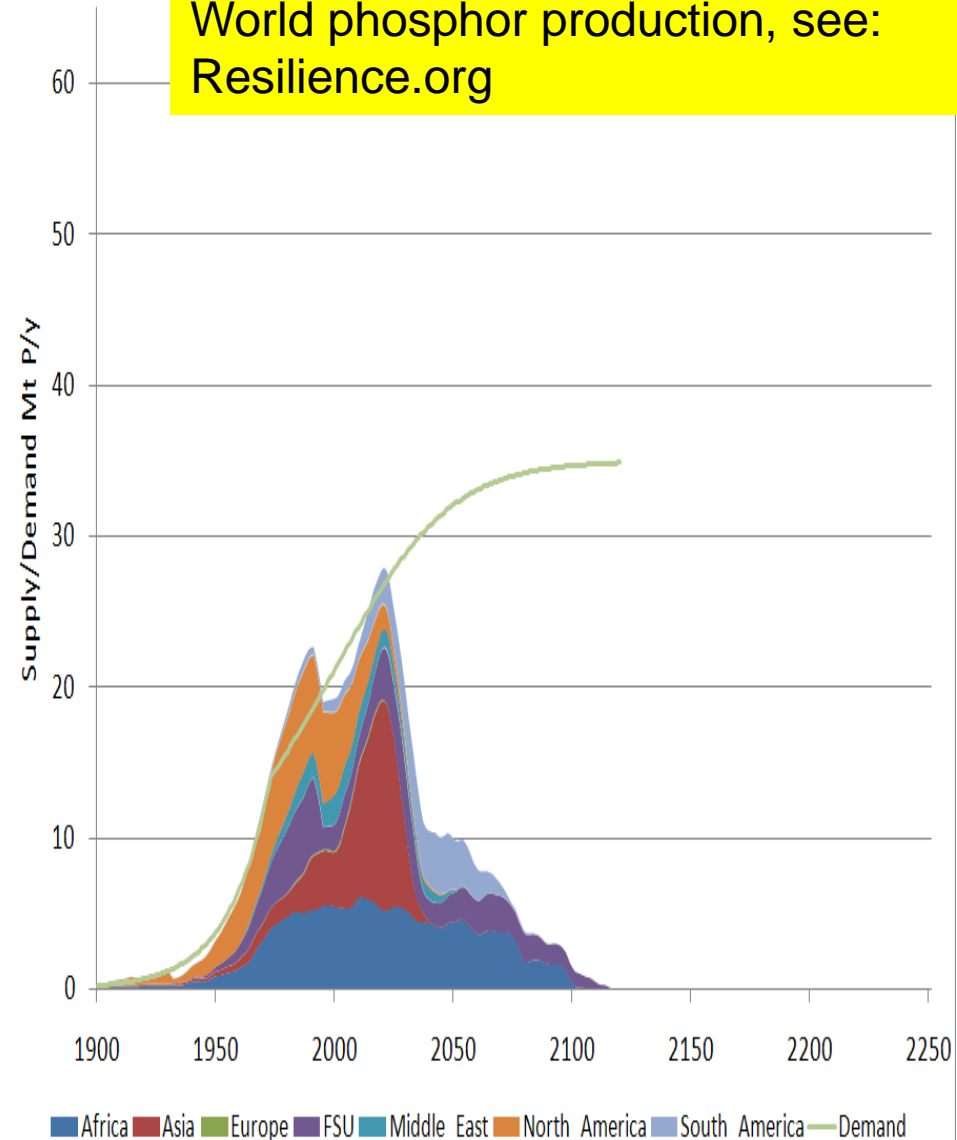
Limits of nature at the input-side: cheap raw materials and energy are becoming scarce

Figure 7: Oil production world summary

ASPO 2008



World phosphor production, see:
Resilience.org



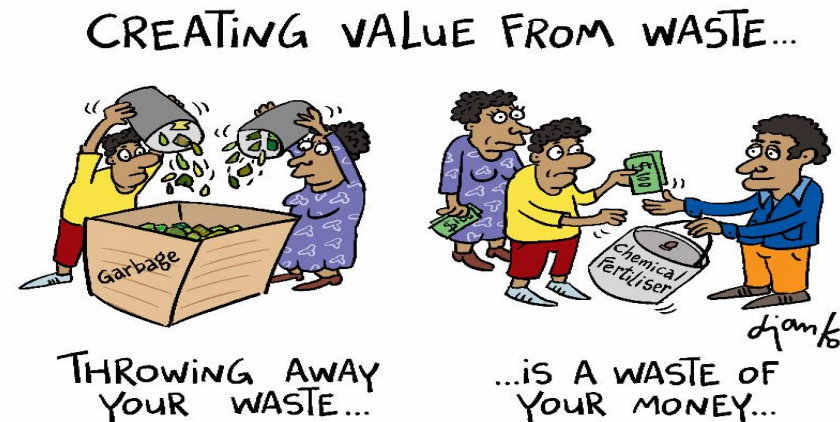
Limits of nature at the output-side:
capitalist economies are “economies in the creation of waste”
(Marx)

“**pollutant management**”: attempt to keep harmful substances away from humans

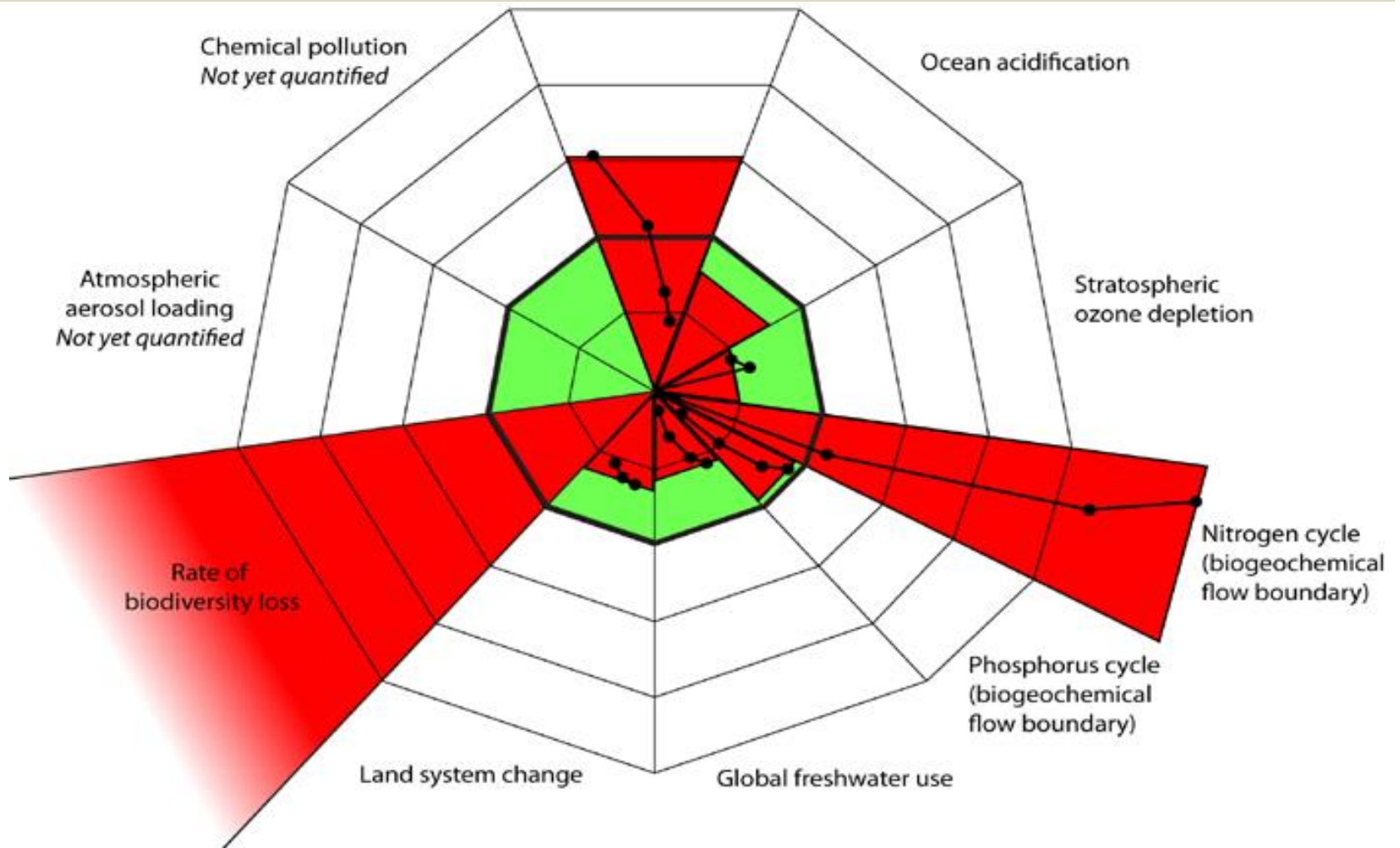
“**recycling**”: only occurs to the extent that it lowers production costs

„...no society can go on producing,
in other words, no society can
reproduce, unless it constantly
reconverts a part of its products
into means of production“
(Capital 1/Chapt.1)“

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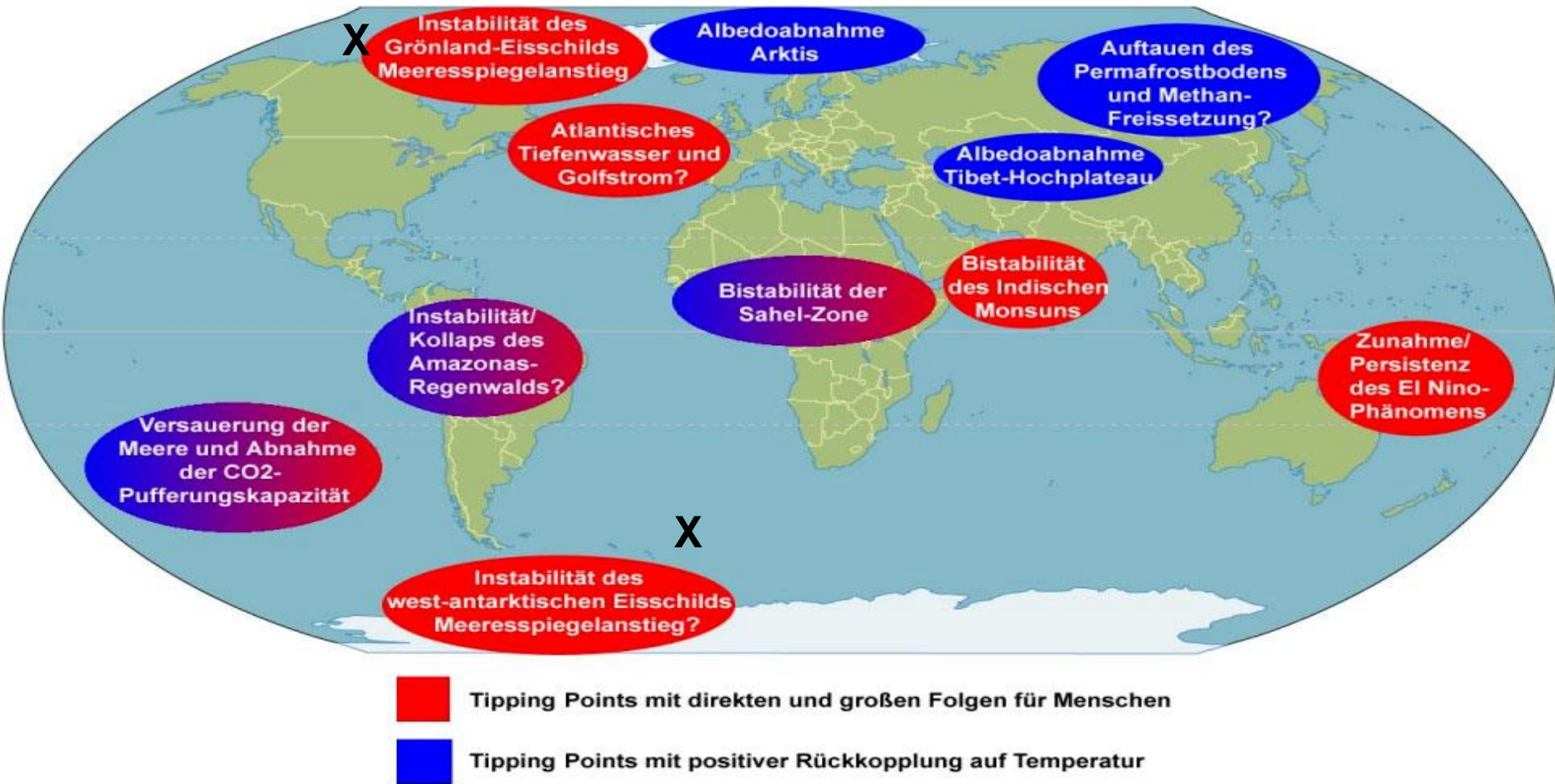


At the output-side of capitalism:
a collapse of the Earth systems is within reach...



From the perspective of natural scientists we are leaving already the “safe operating space” of planet Earth (see Rockström et al 2009)

....which will impact on the “tipping points” of the bio-physical systems



Grafik: Erstellt und übersetzt von Germanwatch auf der Grundlage der "World Map of Tipping Points in Climate Change" von Prof. Hans Joachim Schellnhuber

Unbound drive of capitalism for valorization erodes its own material conditions

- logic of capitalist production for exchange rather than use drives the expansion to exploit natural forces (human labour and no-human nature) “for eternity”
- (only) the abstract side of value creation can grow without limits

**Capitalism cannot arbitrarily subsume nature for the sake of its maximum valorization
– without destroying on an expanding scale the fundamental material conditions for
free human development**

↓
„Tipping points“ of development

**within the system
of use values**

**within the system
of exchange value**

in societies

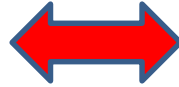
↓
collapse – revolution- transformation?

The world at cross roads

Geoengineering

reduction of GHGs, climate engineering, big projects in energy generation

- high technical efficiency
- solutions with uncertain success
- problem of reach and duration
- problems with international coordination
- role of powerful private actors
- conflicts between countries and new economic blocs – military dimensions



alternative mode of organizing production and reproduction: **Moral economy/ Economy of solidarity**

- radical and quick transition from fossil to solar energies
- leaving most of fossil fuels and minerals in the soil
- regionalisation/ localization
- deceleration and sufficiency
- cooperative forms of work and life
- creation of new forms of collective property
- new combination of market mechanisms and planning on all levels – but most importantly: on planetary scale

Final conclusion (1)

1. **Structural change** that respects socio-economic constraints on human action must establish some kind of “**dynamic equilibrium**” (instead of the growth dynamic) – but this is something that is simply not possible within the capitalist world system - so **what appears to be necessary within capitalism translates into a crisis of capitalism**
2. **The question of private property**: is still the most important lever for structural change – because the power with which the owner of great wealth enforces their private interests prevents us from changing some crucial things
However, the socialization of means of production should not be understood as a one-off legal act, but rather as **a long-lasting process in which society gains real democratic control over its economic life**
3. **The necessary structural change is about the “commons”, the common goods** – in nature and on the Internet, about the “city for all”, production cooperatives and tenants’ associations that deprive the real estate markets of housing, about associations that take energy supply into their own hands and about a revival of “municipal socialism”, which provides education, health, public transport and energy for all.
But it is also clear that in order to realize public wealth in these forms private wealth has to be reduced drastically.

Final conclusion (2)

4. It is difficult to predict whether such a change would be possible without violent uprising – something we usually call **a revolution**.

Undoubtedly, there is **the potential for a revolution** in many countries because tensions are high and unjust inequality is growing.

But in Europe and in the US we are probably more concerned with the **permanent counterrevolution of capitalism**. We are closing our borders and hope that the other take care of the plight. This inevitably leads to disaster.

Rosa Luxemburg's statement on the eve of WW I that the choice is between **socialism or barbarism** today is even more true. Because today we have the choice between the very existence of future generations or to end **“capitalism as we know it”** (Elmar Altvater 2005)

“The true utopia is the belief that the existing global system can continue to reproduce itself infinitely; the only way to be realistic is to realize what seems to be simply impossible within the coordinates of this system” (Slavoj Žižek, in: DER STANDARD, 19. 5. 2008)