

# The Production of Commons and the “Explosion” of the Middle Class

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## *Commoning and Value Struggles*

In the last few decades, a theoretical stalemate has developed between Marxism, Post-structuralism and Neoliberalism, which coincided with what has been termed “the end of history”, that is the idea that capitalist markets and Western democracy are the bliss point of human evolution<sup>1</sup>. In the book *The Beginning of History* (De Angelis 2007) I argue that the diverse struggles for commons and dignity around the planet developed in the last few decades across the wage hierarchy reveal a different reality: that of the “beginning of history”, of the positing of modes of producing in commons other than those promoted by profit seeking capital.

By beginning from and ending into the problematic of the commons, I seek to offer a different perspective on social conflict than traditional Marxists and post-structuralists authors. On one hand, I wish to de-fetishise the objectified concepts of orthodox Marxism like value, primitive accumulation and capital, and uncover their living “essence” rooted in what I call *value struggles*. In this sense, following the basic approach of what has been termed Autonomist Marxism (Cleaver 1979), social conflict in the form of class struggle is not regarded as a variable among many (such as economic, cultural, social etc.), but constituent themselves of social practices. On the other hand, I also rejected Foucauldian nominalism and the associated dissolution of social conflict into an embroilment of resistances without clear class “frontline”, arguing instead that the traditional class struggle is over the modes of producing values.<sup>2</sup> This interpretation of social conflict also allows the development of a theoretical framework that brings together concepts like commons, enclosure, autonomy, discipline, and social reproduction to illuminate how global capital survives and accumulate in the face of the social conflict it generates. I thus argue that the market functions as a force of enclosure and discipline (of subjectivities and commons/communities) and not as a source of liberation as the neoliberals believe. Hence, it follows that also the slogan of the alter-globalization movement “another world is possible” must be subjected to our engaged critique since not only are beyond-capital worlds already in existence, but the issue of the *commoning* across these alternatives becomes paramount. This in order to sustain, reproduce and extend the organizational reach of other-than capital forms of (re)production in common of livelihoods and *at the same time* keep at bay and push back the capitalist form of production in common. Here is the problematic of the *frontline*: a way to reproduce livelihoods in common versus another way to reproduce livelihoods in commons, a form of *commoning* versus another form of *commoning*, or, a *value struggle*.

*Commoning*, a term encountered by Peter Linebaugh (2008) in one of his frequent travels in the living history of commoners’ struggles, is about the (re)production of/through

commons<sup>3</sup>. To turn a noun into a verb is not a little step and requires some daring. Especially if in doing so we do not want to obscure the importance of the noun, but simply ground it on what is, after all, life flow: there are no commons without incessant activities of commoning, of (re)producing in common. But it is through (re)production in common that communities of producers decide for themselves the norms, values and measures of things. Let us put the “tragedy of the commons” to rest then, the basis of the economists argument for enclosures: there is no commons without commoning, there are no commons without communities of producers and particular flows and modes of relations.<sup>4</sup> Hence, what lies behind the “tragedy of the commons” is really the tragedy of the destruction of commoning through all sorts of structural adjustments, whether militarised or not.<sup>5</sup>

It is because this organic relation between the activity of the commoners and the commons that “commons” rights differ, in their constitution, from legal rights such as “human”, “political” or “social” rights. In the latter sense, a “right” is a legal entitlement to have or obtain something or to act in a certain way. A title deed constitutes evidence of such a right. For the medieval English commoners instead,

common rights are embedded in a particular ecology with its local husbandry. . . . Commoners first think not of title deeds, but human deeds: how will this land be tilled? Does it require manuring? What grows there? They begin to explore. One might call it a natural attitude. Second, commoning is embedded in a labor process; it inheres in a particular praxis of field, upland, forest, marsh, coast. Common rights are entered into by labor. Third, commoning is collective. Fourth, commoning, being independent of the state, is independent also of the temporality of the law and state. It goes deep into human history" (Linabough 2008: 44-45).

The positing *for today* of the question of what form of commoning, of (re)producing in common, and the field of common rights as distinct from legal rights, means therefore that we cannot separate the question of autonomy, community, life-flow, and ecology, but must assert them *all at once* while struggling for livelihoods. This implies that we must seek and advance new critical perspectives, that make the problematic of transforming *our* world, of constituting new social relations of production beyond those imposed by capitalist processes, their central preoccupation. Not perspectives that *reduce* every single problematic of struggle to the question of new forms of commoning. One the contrary, that *expand* every single problematic of struggle as carried by singular subjects within a stratified planetary wage hierarchy so as to pose the political question (and express it in organizational means) of our production in common across stratification and, therefore, beyond it.

Here the challenge is how to engage in a constituent process of new social relations, which can only be a process of *commoning*, able to keep at bay and push back the form of commoning predicated on capitalist relations and, therefore, capitalist value practices. One basic condition for meeting this challenge is that we face up a hard reality of what we are up against, that is capital as a *social force and field of social relations that seeks to reproduce itself through boundless expansion*. This means first, that struggle is both necessary for the subjects and ubiquitous across the social fields inhabited by capitalist

relations. However, it also implies that *struggle is the life-blood of the system's dynamism*.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, second, this dynamism is predicated upon and produces a new vertical segmentation of the condition of reproduction of labour power. The “working class” is divided in a wage hierarchy and no *ideological* call for unity will ever bring the different segments to work together in the direction of a radical transformation of their production in common *beyond* capital, and *therefore beyond* their hierarchy. Struggle therefore is *also* divided across a wage hierarchy, which implies that the possibility of its capitalist *governance*, predicated on division and exclusion at a point of crisis, are quite broad.

In *The Beginning of History*, I have discussed at length this organic link between capital's dynamism and struggle, the role of enclosures, disciplinary markets and governance, that must be viewed as different but complementary strategic coordinates for the reproduction of that social force we call capital. The question open for us is how do we articulate this analysis of capital with that of the organization alternatives in condition of today's globalization? That is, within, against and beyond capital in the context of today class composition, today particular configuration of subjectivities, particular planetary configurations and hierarchy of social cooperation of labour (waged and unwaged)?

As a contribution to this debate, I want here to return to the problematic of political subjectivity vis-à-vis these processes of separation (enclosures), systemic recuperation (disciplinary markets) and cooptation (governance) of the social body that struggle in their daily reproduction of their livelihoods. I want to return to the subjects and problematise the question of a political recomposition that not only has the possibility to engage in a Deleuzian “line of flight” by rupturing the system, but can do this without *at the same time* having to return — albeit in new social forms — to the commoning of capital that has shown historically and geographically to be so flexible in adapting to new struggles. In other words, I am talking about lines of flight, without capitalist landing. This is of course a crucial question for all those whose perspective is the *sustainability* of the “beginning of history”, the persistence and *development* in time of new forms of commoning, of producing in commons that push back those compatible with the self-preservation of capital.

From the point of view of the subjects, the clash of value practices implies first of all a “refusal”, a “no” to indignity, as Holloway (2004) so clearly put it. However, we have an immediate problem on our hand. How can we refuse capital's measure without actively and self-consciously participating in the constitution of other common measures? And how can we participate in this commonality without at the same time setting a limit, refusing capital's measure of things and its drive to separate, subsume and co-opt?<sup>7</sup> The setting of a limit to the “beast” and the problematic of how to constitute and sustain the “outside” which is brought to life by the many struggles, are two inescapable strategic coordinates of the beginning of history.

One of the problems we face when dealing with this issue is that often, when pushed to provide “alternatives”, thinkers and writers in social movements trouble themselves to provide *models*. To simplify to the limit, from “utopian” visions of confederated spaces to “socialist” and “progressive” left-wing pundits' proclamation of what “proper” policies should be instead of the current, the pressure is to provide imaginaries of alternatives that appear – in one sense or in another – to be reasonable. In our illustrative spectrum above,

the classic proposals of self-managing confederated utopias have nothing to tell us about the imageries and configuration of powers of the current particular class composition, on how such a multitude would in any way reach utopia or whether they would consider “reasonable” such an utopia, once combined as a social force for change. What is reasonable here is measured in ideological terms, not in terms of concrete bodies, reproducing their livelihoods in concrete and specific situations and whose common “beginning of history” can only have as presupposition these concrete and specific situations. The vacuum is filled with an ideological struggle that seek converted. In a Western urban environment this might be expressed in this way: capital wants you to eat meat, you must become vegan; capital wants you to earn money, you build a life-style without money; capital wants you to compete, you proclaim “solidarity”, and so on. However expressive of real desires and processes of identities production that seek disengagement from capital’s value practices, an ideological struggle of this type can only produce, precisely, singular *identities*, individual and groups whose values system is pre-defined as ethical choice. But commoning is not only based on pre-existent values, pre-existent “ethical” choices. The commoning we seek is also and most importantly *a field of production of values*, and the precondition for this production is that a wide range of *different* ethics, different *cultures*, different life-styles, and, as we will see, different power positions within the planetary wage hierarchy participate in the co-production of new systems of values, of producing what is of *common* value together.

On the other side of the spectrum, the left-wing pundits proposals for “progressive” laws to solve the “problems” created by the current laws or current government, is to appear reasonable to the Middle Class (which we will define below). Here, from the perspective of the beginning of history, the problem is specular. While for the utopian proposals an ethical choice is defined as the precondition of the establishment of an identity separated from capital, here the ethic of capital is the precondition for a proposal that aims at addressing and solving a problem created by the working of capitalist relations themselves. Financial capital mobility is deemed “excessive”? Introduce some capital control. There is “too much” free trade? Introduce some protectionism. The Middle Class is battered after 30 years of restructuring? Voice some populism in the next electoral campaign and call for tax reduction “not only for the rich”. Migrants are needed and we “are a country of migrants after all”? Introduce some “humane” form of detention and regulation since “we do not want them to be a burden on our cash-strapped public services” and there is going to be the recession anyway, hence better tighten up regulation. Ecological disaster is looming? Encourage the use of energy saving technologies without *ever* questioning the social premises associated to the supreme value of “economic” growth and the correspondent increase in *total* energy requirement. There is a major risk of systemic meltdown through a wave of financial bankruptcies at the heart of the planetary financial centers? Put on hold your free market beliefs and bail the system out with public money so as the system can start again. From the perspective of the beginning of history, not only the way these problems are constructed, but also the policies these construction gives rise to, are problematic. If implemented these policies are not a step towards a general overcoming of the current forms of production in common, as if capital was not able to use and manage, in its 300 history, some forms of capital control, lower taxes, protectionism, “humane” forms of detention of the marginalized and “alternative” energy sources such as wind and water mills powering earlier sweatshops of the industrial era. The problem we must face is that the ethic of capital can

absorb even what appear to be the most radical aspects of these proposals, since they present themselves as alternative modes regulation of the same-sameness, of our *capitalist* production in common. In this sense, as experience has taught us, and theoretical work can help us to elucidate, these proposals might address some genuine preoccupation that emerge from below and from struggle, but in a way that take these struggles back *inside* the problematic of the *end of history*, not for the creation of an *outside*, a *beginning of history*.<sup>8</sup>

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The bottom line of the discussion so far is that the minimum condition for alternatives to be able to both reproduce themselves and set a limit to capital is that they constitute *processes of commoning* through which cooperating subjects seek, establish, represent, and communicate a field of value production which is not only opposed to that of capital, but also propositive and constituent of new social relations at every occasion of struggle. In this sense, the process of commoning beyond capital is a process of destructive *creation* as opposed to the process of creative destruction of Schumpeterian memory. While for the latter the creation of the new and the correspondent destruction of the old is concerned with the mutation of the forms of capitalist social relations<sup>9</sup>, we can understand the concern of destructive creation the destruction of these very capitalist relations and the correspondent creation of new forms of commoning predicated on different value productions. Here the emphasis is on the constituent processes of commoning other than capital, rather than on mutated forms of capitalist commoning.

I can now put forward my hypothesis: to launch an offensive for a new commoning and new commons understood in the general terms outlined above, implies very *concretely* to contribute to the *explosion* of the “Middle Class”, both in the Global North and in the Global South. In the following section I will make my argument by discussing what I mean by the Middle Class, and then by its “explosion”.

### **The Middle Class as a type of laboring subjectivity**

**WARNING:** if you read this section and think I am talking about you, well you may be right. You are probably Middle Class. But the good news is this: at the same time you also are probably not. This is the frontline of value struggle passing through you and me.

The Middle Class is a daily preoccupation that haunt politicians seeking votes, marketing agencies seeking sales, banks seeking debtors clients, and pension fund managers seeking savings to invest in global markets and capitalize on planetary enclosures. In this sense, I understand the Middle Class not as homogeneous social group, with a given level of income, but as a *stratified field of subjectivity disciplined to a large degree to the norms of behavior of a modern society in which capital has a fundamental role in organizing social production through disciplinary markets, enclosures, governance and its profit seeking enterprises*.<sup>10</sup>

This definition allows us to account for a sort of oscillation between the definition of Middle Class as a social “norm” and its use as a descriptive analytical tool. On one hand,

as a field of subjectivity disciplined to a degree in the sense here defined, the Middle Class is the social subject which social practices produces normalization to the system and therefore is a condition for the reproduction of the system itself. One the other, at any given time, the Middle Class presupposes specific material conditions of social reproduction and the existence of subjects who are bounded to be excluded from the Middle Class.

In this sense, the Middle Class is a ghost haunting any single of us along a vertical wage hierarchy, subjects who operate daily, in a myriad of forms, for the reproduction of their own bodies, communities, families, labour powers, and livelihoods, *within* the boundaries of the system and in such a way to reproduce, through their money and market mediated interaction, the boundaries of the system. Subjects who, depending on their position in the wage hierarchy within a spatially defined reproduction field (De Angelis 2007: 73-75), have access to cash and/or credit to reproduce their livelihoods, and who, to a variety of degree depending on the *amount* of cash and/or credit they can access, *reproduce* these livelihoods outsourcing the labour of their own reproduction onto an *alien other* in the market. The condition of the Middle Class is generated by the medium of their reproduction in common: capitalist markets.

Two things follow from this. In the first place, we cannot hate the Middle Class without hating ourselves, as we endure many of our practices once they are understood as interconnected fields of capitalist relations of production. “Middle Class guilt” has a material basis after all, although we should not be seduced in wanting to change the world through forms that are compatible with the reproduction of the Middle Class and, therefore, the basis for its guilt. “Charity” — the main receptive of this guilt — is an industry that reproduces the current social relations of production, not a vehicle for the beginning of history. Second, to act as Middle Class is not simply a question of following a mainstream ideology, an hegemonic culture in which the values of the ruling elites become common sense values for all. This classic Gramscian approach must be modified with the consideration that the forms of commoning through which we produce and reproduce ourselves *are* forms of value production. The waves of marketisation and precarisation of the last two decades, together with the evolution of what is called the “knowledge economy” eliciting social creativity and innovation, is making increasingly clear the implication of this: these forms of capitalist commoning *demand from individual singularities* that they deploy modes of measurement and evaluations that both keep them *inside* the social process of exchange value production (missing this, they are simply under the threat of non-reproduction) *and* push for continuous *outsides* in the forms of “use value” production. Here it is again, Schumpeter’s creative destruction. To the extent Middle Class culture is hegemonic culture therefore, it is the hegemony of the *holding together* of this contradiction, a contradiction that Marx sees grounded on the commodity form (Marx 1867: chapter 1) and in the capitalist social processes of reproduction.

The Middle Class is a labouring subjectivity. Middle Class pilots and hostess run aviation, Middle Class drivers run trains, while Middle Class ticket inspectors make sure we all act as Middle Class and pay the ticket. Middle Class copy-editors write new messages to sell commodities to Middle Class “ethical” consumers. Middle Class brokers seek profitable ways to invest pension funds of Middle Class radical sociology teachers. The Middle Class is responsible for the running of many of Western factories, social

services, police, courts, schools, universities, science labs, insurance companies, army, state and government bureaucracy, and political parties. Or better, this is the case *if one excludes the non-citizens* from this calculation that is the invisible migrants. Indeed, even the most “progressive” representatives of the Middle Class, when in power, do not count these, as they are outside the boundaries of what constitutes *citizenship* by the letter of the law which, as we will see, helps *define* the Middle Class.<sup>11</sup> Again, we are not supposing a level of income, but a field of subjectivity normalized to the boundaries of the system. And we are not necessarily discussing individual attitudes within a group. We are discussing the rules governing the group.

There are wage hierarchies within the Middle Class. There is impoverishment within the Middle Class. Yet, there is a deep-rooted illusion that “betterment” will come through individual action such as effort, education, and so on. Or better, this is an illusion to the extent we reason from the perspective of the whole. For the individual, betterment *of course might* well arise through his or her readiness and equipment to fight the ongoing civil war through which we reproduce our livelihoods, competition. Or it might not. The point is that the Middle Class is precisely one with an ideology of betterment through individual effort — a practical ideology this, as it provides a compass for individual action — and the market is the social mechanism through which the fruits of these efforts are reaped (or not). Unfortunately of course, what the Middle Class interactive subjectivities do not realize is that one of the products of such competitive interaction is the continuous movement of the goalpost through which everybody’s “effort” is measured, making it harder to reap benefit and contributing to the creation of divisions and hierarchy within the Middle Class itself.<sup>12</sup>

Middle Class communities are thus necessarily — to a variety of degrees depending on context — *gated* communities. CCTV cameras, security guards, detention camps and prisons surround these. Depending on their relative size, these gated communities are clearly visible to our eyes, or not. In many areas of the Global South, in Johannesburg or Rio de Janeiro for example, we can see them clearly as we walk around for a stroll in residential areas and they appear to us as small enclaves, homes or entire neighborhoods to prevent the poor, the not-middle-class yet, from coming in. In the global North, the gates are perhaps less visible to daily life, as we are both more normalized to them, or they are more pervasive, as indicated by the 10,000 CCTV cameras for the cost of 200 million pounds in a city like London (Davenport 2007). Or perhaps we should consider the entire national or supranational territory<sup>13</sup> as an example of a large gated community, as detention camps and custom officers strive to keep the poorer, the not-middle-class yet, from coming in *on their own terms*<sup>14</sup>. Just as the *poor* are allowed in the gated communities of the global cities to attend to its needs — as security guards, as cleaners, as domestic labourers, as builders, etc. — so here custom officers are patrolling the borders of a field of capitalist *busy-ness*, a reproduction field, which necessitates careful control as tensions in the labour markets are accumulated and the management of migration contributes to de-compress (Mezzadra and Neilson 2003).

As laboring subjectivity, the Middle Class is, after all, an empirical term to describe a subset of what we would theoretically call *Working Class*, the name of a social and political subject that we understand reproduces its livelihoods in opposition to and as part of capital, a term that for us includes both the waged and the unwaged, it is

segmented and divided in a wage hierarchy, and it is planetary in character. The Middle Class for us *is* Working Class minus a firm presence — aspirational, symbolical, or concrete — in the outside of capital.

Thus, it is important to understand that the Middle Class also struggles, but it struggles as Middle Class. The Middle Class, as any class, has its range of modalities and oscillations<sup>15</sup> among strategic coordinates, that is the pillars which allows its survival and reproduction qua Middle Class.<sup>16</sup> One of these pillars is “order”. The Middle Class ultimately wants “order”. This is increasingly so and with good reasons. “Order” is a necessary condition of the capitalist form of production in common, especially as experienced by Middle Class with a high degree of responsabilisation and normalization. The reproduction of Middle Class livelihoods increasingly *depends* on order. It would take a major social reckoning to explode this need for order and give space to the desire of *other* orders, that is other social and spatial dimensions of cyclical time through which values are created (De Angelis 2007), which are not functional to the incessant and pressing need to get money into the family budget. Take for example the American Middle Class, of which all the candidates in any presidential election claim seek to be the true representatives. In the last few decades Middle Class families, even with two paychecks, have developed quite stretched finances, leaving them insecure, with less and less room for error, and therefore unable to consider any alternative but running the competitive race. In the last few decades, the only increase in income for a family has come from a second paycheck, as the median income of a full employed male has dropped in real term and women struggle for autonomy in the 1960s and 1970s has been co-opted by capital into intensified competition in the labour market and market outsourcing of reproduction labour. This has raised the household income by about 70% since the 1970s, but has at the same time increased the amount spent in essentials for the reproduction of the household and increased enormously family *financial risk*. Today’s “average” Middle Class families, have budgeted to the limits of their cash potential. This financial risk has increased for a variety of reasons. First, unlike the case of a generation ago, incomes are less dependent now due to few decades of neoliberal reforms with its outsourcing, threat of precarity, and cut in welfare entitlements. Second, due to the increased reliance on two incomes, families have lost flexibility in compensating for a loss in income due to sickness or lay offs. Any change in family fortunes today, cannot be compensated by an other family member going into waged employment, (s)he is already doing it. Third, despite the fall in the cost of manufacturing goods — due to the million of poorly paid workers in China and in other export processing zones around the world sweating it all out — which contributed to keep real wages from falling more drastically, about 75% of family outing is now in essential *fixed* cost — mortgage, car payments, health and insurance, childcare. This is costs that cannot be cut back unless the basic structure of a family reproduction is restructured: a home, a car, an education or health coverage is foregone (Warren 2006). It is obvious therefore, that in this context, Middle Class families grow in debt and are increasingly allured into the possibility of becoming *rantiers*, that is of making money out of the ups and down of financial markets. It goes without saying that the systemic limitations of such an avenue for “betterment” have become tragically obvious once again in the financial meltdown of 2008.

The other strategic pillar of the Middle Class is “betterment” of its conditions of living. But since its horizons is that of the end of history, for Middle Class “betterment” is

constructed within a world dominated by capital, its enclosures and its forced separation from commons, disciplinary markets and its competitive pitting livelihoods against one another, and governance and its techniques of division and exclusion. This implies that “betterment” can ultimately only be actualized through a wage hierarchy. The Middle Class as such cannot stare in the face the simple fact that the 6 billion of us cannot be Middle Class, and this for two reasons. First, even through recycling and energy efficient light bulbs, it would require several planets to accommodate such a way of life.<sup>17</sup> Second, since this way of life would be produced through capitalist commoning, it would be predicated on hierarchy and exclusion. In other words, from the perspective of the whole, Middle Class “betterment” is an illusion constructed in between the Scylla of ecological disaster, and the Caribdi of poverty and detritus. Yet, the Middle Class keeps seeking “betterment” in its own terms. Its plans (for “better” government, for “nicer” environment, for “less” poverty, for “improved” public services, for “better” wages) appear at first opposing something, to offer a Plan B with respect to the one that is being implemented. The party of “Order” and the party of “Betterment” are often opposed in political elections, as these are the moments in which the steering wheel needs to be moved more in one direction or in another in order to reproduce the whole. The truth is that each of the counterpoising parties, once in government, are both a party of “Order” and a party of “Betterment”, since both will seek Middle Class votes the next round. Therefore, for the Middle Class, there is no true plan B that would move us into a radically different form of commoning. For the Middle Class there are only different modulations and orientation of Plan A, the capitalist commoning.

The boundary of the system in which the Middle Class operates among other social actors, are boundaries that include and, especially, seek to include the conflict that is either generated therein or from the outside of the system itself. Examples of the first are classical labour struggles, contained by and large within bureaucratic procedures and codified systems of representation; pressure groups to reform a law within the institutional procedures; voting for opposition parties for forming new governments, social movements contained within ritual manifestations of social power (demos, etc.) for becoming a visible *identity* and pressing for the recognition through a bill of rights. It must be clear here that I am not passing value judgment on these conflicts. As “worker”, “concerned citizen”, “father”, “husband”, “neighbor” and “friend” I am an engaged actor in many of them. Yet, it is also clear that the transformative power of these struggles singularly taken has a very limited impact on *control* and *disciplinary* mechanisms of capitalist processes. Bureaucratic maneuvering, monetary or migration policies, capital mobility and disciplinary markets can displace labour struggles. New government parties structure their difference in such a way to make it compatible with the general system of laws and priorities of global capital. New social subjects can gain visibility and march from the margin into the mainstream, without questioning the processes that creates marginalization and therefore, a new generation of marginalised. Once we dispose of the idea of a linear progress, no “reform” can delude us that we are “on the right track”. Instead, we must be alert to the fact that a reform, precisely and literally, might well contribute to *re-form* again the same processes and structures of dominations.

The world of banking and finance up the crisis of 2008 can serve as an example of how the Middle Class, that is a laboring subjectivity that operates within the system of capital’s valuing process, recreate itself and the common context of its interaction. Take

the stock market operators that are said to have a memory span of 24 hours in their field of activity, and who divide themselves in two parties, the bear and the bull, those who bet on an asset's value going down, and those who believe and bet it will go up. The betting strategies follows suit these beliefs. In between, the swing voters will join one or the other parties depending on band-wagon processes. Now, the value of any assets in a given moment of time will be the net result of these forces, whoever has put down more money to push the market in one direction or the other. But once bears or bulls find their expectations confirmed by the events there is a point that the bears will start to turn into bulls, and will buy the deflated assets at "bargain price", in the expectation now that it will rebound. Is it conceivable that the systemic end of its operations follows a collapse of the stock market and this market might occur *on its own term* that is without an outside intervention? I believe not. For the simple reason that a crisis will simply imply a reconfiguration of the debits and the credits, at which point the game can continue. The working of the *system* is based on the expectations that bears follow bulls, and rapid growth period are followed by recessions and slumps. In different historical times there might be — for good historical reasons — a difference in the timing, intensity, wavelength of these phenomena. At one point, state authorities might even need to suspend the working of stock markets for a while in order to limit the damage brought by the system by the presence of too many bulls or bears and bring in some reforms to appease operators. Yet, the point is that the inner working of these forces produces fluctuation. The Middle Class subjectivities operating on a daily basis in these trades, *know* this. They know that independently from the fact that today they may loose or gain, tomorrow will be another *trading* day, if not for them because they got bankrupt, at least for those with liquid capital who will shop for bargains. The *system* produces ups and downs as a breathing mechanism and it is itself produced by the *labouring* of Middle Class traders who precisely *expect* the system will be there tomorrow. And once we are talking about financial markets in which bonds, futures and options extend expectations of profitability quite few years ahead (and found their current value by discounting this flow of future income), we are also talking about expectations of a capitalist future. The *Middle Class* reproduces its livelihood expecting that tomorrow production in common will be like today. The Middle Class is the political subject of the end of history.

Things could be a bit different if outside the stock market, someone was playing the drum and refusing the restructuring, rationalization, cuts, flexibilisation, dispossessions, enclosures with all their planetary ramifications that were suited necessary to "rationalize the economy," "revitalize growth" and improve "confidence" after the financial cracks or following the movements of financial swings. And things would certainly be different if they were to refuse this by *at the same time* seeking to seize the means of existence while reconstitute their social cooperation through new commons and new commoning. Things would be much different. Back in the offices of traders, the number of "good bargains" available in computer screens would start to drop by the hour, before disappearing completely to give space to a flashing window deposited by a hacker saying: "the world is *no longer* for sale". Suddenly, there would no longer be Middle Class, neither on the trading floor, nor on the streets.

The point illustrated by this little vignette, can be rehearsed at a broader social scale. Let us ask the original question: is it conceivable that a systemic collapse and end of the capitalist market might occur *on its own terms*, that is without an outside intervention?

To reiterate my earlier answer, now applied on a larger scale: I believe not. For the simple reason that any of the many possible systemic crises will simply imply a reconfiguration of ownerships and control of the social means of existence and production, at which point capital's commoning game can continue. The working of the *system* of the capitalist commoning (which includes market and state/political processes) is based on the expectations that rapid growth periods are followed by recessions and slumps. In different historical times there might be — for good historical reasons — a difference in the timing, intensity, wavelength of these phenomena. Or even a geographic articulation between growth and slumps. Yet, their inner working produces fluctuation. The Middle Class subjectivities operating on a daily basis across the division of labour and types of contract, *know* this. They know that independently from the fact that today they may lose or gain, get sacked or hired, tomorrow will be another *market* day or *election* day, or working day. If not for them at least for those who are “active participant” in the labour market, “engaged” citizens, and “happy shoppers”. The *system* and its subsystem produce ups and downs as a breathing mechanism and it is itself produced by the *labouring* of Middle Class subjects who precisely *expect* the system will be there tomorrow. And since we are talking about the intertwining of states, markets and livelihoods, there are expectations that project quite few decades if not centuries down the line. These expectations and their material basis — the power of capital to be constituted as a social force with the bodies of Middle Class policemen and/or with the bodies of Middle Class pundits who call for reforms and/or the bodies of Middle Class workers who “don't have much time for politics” because the pressing needs to reproduce their livelihoods and those of their communities — do not leave much space for any *hope* different from wishful thinking. Also in this case we are talking about expectations of a capitalist future. The *Middle Class* reproduces its livelihood expecting that tomorrow's production in common will be like today, will be predicated on the same “laws” of interaction, given shape by the pursue in common of the same value, that of more money. This is the reason why the Middle Class seek to send their children to “better” school, and to “better” universities, measured in terms of the competitive potentials of their degree. They conceive their children's future to be dominated by the same broad rules of the games that they have been playing. To repeat: the Middle Class is the political subject of the end of history.

There appear to be no threatening drumming outside here, a part for the ritual dance in some contract renewal. It will be soon put to silence by a loss or a victory, for one or the other — but this is only to trigger a reconfiguration of winners and losers across the planetary system.

### **The “Explosion” of the Middle Class and the Outside**

We must face and recognize a deep political truth, which historically got confused in the long debate between reform and revolution — a false polarity that has tragically crossed the XXth century. Neither the Middle Class, qua Middle Class, nor its representatives and “service providers” (political parties within a system of bourgeois democracy, marketing agencies within a system of competing corporations, job agencies within a system of competing labourers), will *ever* be able to contribute to bring about a fundamental change of the system which emerge out of our daily activity *within* the

system. The production in common centered on Middle Class *values* — however historically and culturally specific they are — is always production in common *within* the system. Our *common* action as Middle Class action, whether as consumers, workers, or citizens, reproduces the system of value and value hierarchy that is the benchmark, the referent point for our cooperation.

The problem we face is therefore this: there will be no beginning of history without the Middle Class, nor there will be one with the Middle Class (i.e. with the system that reproduce labouring subjectivity as Middle Class).

We must therefore seek an outside from which to stand on new ground and wage our struggle! If the Middle Class will have to force itself beyond itself, outside itself, how else could it do it but through an explosion? And how else could this explosion be triggered but by the impact with what is already outside itself?

I of course mean *explosion* only and uniquely metaphorically, what else would it be possible without undermining the perspective of the beginning of history. This is for two reasons. First, our understanding of Middle Class — which I repeat is stratified within a wage hierarchy — coincides with mainstream life in the global North, and with increasing sizeable pockets in the Global South worshipped by global developers as the benchmark of human civilisation<sup>18</sup>. To seek its physical elimination cannot therefore coincide with the project of the *beginning of history*. Second, real, indiscriminate or targeted explosions of real Middle Class bodies might have found their social, political or religious condemnation or justification, but are utter nonsense as strategic assets for the beginning of new forms of commoning beyond capital. The physical explosion of the Middle Class and its media representation creates fear, and fear creates prisons for the many, not the few. It therefore creates opportunities to channel that fear of “security” to feed the fear of staying behind the race, by getting rid of all “troublemakers” or perceived as such who did not have anything to do with those explosions in the first place, by erecting more gated communities.

That modern oracle of commons *Wikipedia* defines an explosion as “a sudden increase in volume and release of energy in an extreme manner, usually with the generation of high temperatures and the release of gases. An explosion creates a shock wave.” (accessed 6 Feb 2008) The explosion of the Middle Class we seek therefore, is a sudden increase in the volume of social cooperation and correspondent release of playful energies, in such a way as to create a socio-cultural shock wave. Now, this is what I would call, with an understatement, a proper *movement*. So, again, how else could this explosion be triggered but by the impact with what is already outside itself? And what is outside the Middle Class?

There are three outsides to the Middle Class as we have defined it. The first one passes through Middle Class subjects themselves, to all, to a variety of degree, and it is expressed in atomic re-appropriations of labour time and its products and space away from capital, or in molecular communities reproducing commons and their defense in factories, in the offices, in the neighborhoods, in the homes, in the streets, in cyberspace. It is the frontline of value struggle passing through the bodies of labouring subjects. It’s the hint that what we are doing in common, and how we are doing it, is crazy. It’s the daily

apprehension of reality beyond the fetish. It's the guy responsible for purchasing chicken in a supermarket chain, abhorring for an instant at the idea that he may be instrumental for the appalling ways those chicken are produced. Or the woman taking up a job in a development NGO and hating the fact that most of her time has to be spent to fine tune projects to the requirements of donors. Or the precarious call center worker who hates repeating stupid marketing questions to rude and uninterested respondents.

These outsides, if given an organizational form, might then well be later co-opted and made to work for capital when articulated to its reproduction, but they nevertheless sparks light when they appear. The Middle Class subjects, with all the dangers of generalization, are divided subjects, a division which is an expression of their separation from the commons. They face their commoning, their social production in common, as an alien force posited outside them, as money, as "the economy", and hence they face one another within this social cooperation as "other" and "foreigner". On the other hand, they also face one another directly, as colleagues, friends, mothers and fathers, uncles and aunts, friends or enemies, sons or daughters, mates or companions, neighbors and so on, in a variety of modalities, social roles and forms of social intercourse. In this way, they often combine and recombine communities of struggle in which they discover new communal dimensions for their power through commoning at the frontline.

There is a second outside to the Middle Class. It is the political subjectivity that might be created as a result of the change in composition: suddenly, the Middle Class finds that among itself there is an increasing section who either does not want to or cannot sustain its livelihoods as Middle Class. In the first case, we are talking for example of the period of the student movements in the 1960s, in which Middle Class youth battled against the authorities of fathers, police, university professors and politicians, refusing with life-style choices and mass gatherings, the life-style of its class. The beginning of history however is not about individual's life-style; it is about the production in common of life. Capital was able to capture the playful-sexual energies liberated by those movements and channel them into *new* life-styles filling creative jobs with many Middle Class children who had to move on with their lives after the season of protests. It was thus able to turn the struggle for freedom of this movement into a coherent neoliberal project in which individuals pursuit of their "freedom" could occur within commons shaped by disciplinary markets.

In the second case, we are talking about temporary work, casualisation, precarity in a world of drastically reduced social entitlements and skyrocketing personal debt. The specter is given voice in the news: for the first time in the history of capitalism, the Middle Class children of Middle Class families might have to do with *less* than their parents. The "American dream" — the illusion according to which "more" is *always* better and *possible for all* — seem to have reached an impasse. Precariaty seem to be the condition of the age. The Middle Class precariat is often highly educated, the expression of a mass intellectuality brought about by generations of schooling. Yet, many are in low paid jobs that do not have anything to do with their education and the aspirations they invested in them. They are the children of that moving goalpost that the interacting subjectivities within the market always create. Aspirations are often frustrated. The precarious subjects are often in condition to sell a type of labour power for living (say, working as security guard or as hamburger flipper) and offer another type of labour

power as “gift” in order to add a line of “experience” on their CV (say as a “creative” type of job in advertisement). Needs and desires are here held in check one against the other. Ins and outs of one segment of the labour market create, amplify or soften up cycles of depression and exhilaration in subjects. The precariat is thus in a condition of *limbo*, its presence and imaginary is both outside *and* inside the Middle Class.<sup>19</sup> This is a dangerous situation for capital, as we might be in presence of a potential social detonator. Needless to say, this situation, which coincides with some of the trends in the labour market in Western economies in the last 30 years, is now aggravated by the incumbent economic crisis in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

Finally, there is a third outside to the Middle Class, an outside that remind us of the social constitution itself of the Middle Class and, indeed of capitalist production. As we have seen, the social constitution of the Middle Class is predicated on particular social production of “order” and “betterment”. These are both predicated on the construction of “the other”: the other as a foreign alien or the other as the *poor*, the unwaged, the waged at the bottom of the scale (who cannot access “our” rights and entitlements, but who can be forced into migration by “our” rights to capital movements seeking valorization; who can clean “our” office toilets and subways, but who cannot speak to the world about the conditions and remuneration of this because of the threat of detention; who cannot follow the swings of their existential needs and desires, but who must endure the swings of pervasive and never ending capitalist restructuring; who can mind our children so as we can concentrate on the intensity demanded by waged employment, but whose children are minded through an intensification process of unwaged labour of reproduction of sisters and grandparents in the home countries<sup>20</sup>).

In presence of this outside, and its struggles, the Middle Class is truly confronted with its social constitution, the elements defining the invariant character of the Middle Class, that which remains the same through consumer fashion, changes in governments, TV comedy seasons, and structures of labour markets. What remain the same is that the existence of the Middle Class qua Middle Class, even when it moves and struggles, is predicated upon the order of gated communities, identity cards, national and supranational border control which helps define *the average social wage* and the modality of deviation from this average in given reproduction fields. The gate and the management of the gate therefore contribute to structure a yardstick for measuring the singularities’ distance from “betterment”, to measure their progress through the wage hierarchy, whether in a life time or across generations. The policed gate in order to manage a wage hierarchy, and a wage hierarchy in order to legitimize and produce a policed gate: the dissipation of this double dimension involves the dissipation of the Middle Class itself. The emergence of commoning across borders and through the wage hierarchy in forms that are other than the commoning of capital reproducing borders and the wage hierarchy is a commoning through which both borders and wage hierarchy are problematised, and their dissipation seek. But since both borders and wage hierarchy are pillars of the capitalist form of production in commons, to problematise them imply to constitute new forms of production in common.

The explosion of the Middle Class therefore, coincides with a liberation of playful energies that reappropriates resources and re-arranges social relations. Here are the times of revolution: the double crossing of the web of borders, the national borders policed by

the army of the state, and the borders of the wage hierarchy policed by the army of prejudice, patriarchy and racism. How will this explosion be brought about I do not know. But it is clear that if it will come at all, it will be through the creation of an outside of capital which is far greater than the sum of the three outsides I have discussed. And this because it is an outside constituted through the creation of commons across these three outsides. Here the explosion of the Middle Class corresponds to a process of political recomposition across subjects that connect the frontline struggles of capital across the wage hierarchy and national borders resulting in new forms of value production. Seeking commons across these actors is certainly difficult organizational work, but what other ways are there to create the conditions for the *explosion* of the Middle Class and open the ground for the constitution of new commoning beyond that of capital. When we struggle across the wage hierarchy and/or across national borders, we problematise the existing modalities of accessing social wealth created in common in the global factory. When we do this, we cannot avoid transforming ourselves. But this is a transformation of the self of a different nature of those planned out in the “me me me” survival manuals of busy urban Middle Class. It is this process of transformation associated to a *commoning*, of both the subjects involved in co-production and *their relation*. The other is no longer alien but a co-producer of life in commons. The explosion of the Middle Class seems to be truly our *only* hope to save ourselves from alienation, poverty and ecological disaster.

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(last accessed September 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama was the original proponent of the thesis according to which liberal democracy marked the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and the "final form of human government" (Fukuyama 1992: xi). Obviously, in so far as liberal democracy is a political institutional form of capitalist markets, the end of history is the modern ideological expression of capitalist ideology. It is interesting to note the paradox of this statement: this is the ideological conviction that the end of history coincides with the "end of ideologies".

<sup>2</sup> For a broad discussion of the problematic of *value* and its central place in revolutionary projects, see Graeber (2001), especially chapter 3 in which the author discusses value as the "importance given to action". A version of the argument in this chapter is in Graeber (2005). McMurthy (1998) offers an important contribution towards the deconstruction of the market and its associated discourses as "ethical system" and implying a "value war". In De Angelis (2007), especially chapters 2-4, 12 and 13, I build on these and other contributions to reformulate Marx's value theoretical concepts in terms of value struggles.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Linebough (2008) discusses how the Magna Charta issued in 1215 developed as a treaty among contending forces in a civil war, trying to put to rest, among others, the conflict between commons and private property.

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion in *The Commoner* (2003).

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of the relation between enclosures, war and neoliberal globalisation, see for example Federici (2002). For a review of different forms of enclosures see De Angelis (2007: 142-148). The so called "tragedy of the commons" is the economist view of the world which is preoccupied not with commons, but with promoting their *enclosures*. The recent version of the "tragedy of the commons" argument was put forward by Garret Hardin (1968) in the journal *Science*. The core of the argument is that commons are incentive and distribution arrangements that inevitably result in environmental degradation and generally resource depletion. This because the commons are understood as resources for which there is "free" and "unmanaged" access. In this framework, no one has an obligation to take care of commons. In societies in which commons are prevalent, Hardin argues, people live by the principle: 'to each according to his needs' formulated by Marx in his Critique of the Gotha program. By assuming that commons are a free for all space from which competing and atomized "economic men" take as much as they can, Hardin has

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engineered a justification for privatization of the commons space rooted in an alleged natural necessity. There is a major problem with Hardin's formulation. He forgets that there is no common without community within which the modalities of access to common resources are negotiated. Incidentally, this implies that there is no enclosure of commons without at the same time the destruction and fragmentation of communities. However, the "tragedy of the commons" argument is not simply "wrong". Its problem concerns the fact that its players are casted in a rationality and measuring process that is uniquely the type of subject portrayed by capital: *homo economicus*. We can uncover the "apologetics" and "vulgarity" of this argument, only by reclaiming different types of measures for ourselves, different modes of *commoning*. Without wanting to romanticize any of them, there are several examples of "sustainable" traditional commons, in which community decisions set the boundaries of what is "sustainable". Princen (2005: 23) for instance reports, how for the last 500 years Swiss farmers have avoided overgrazing through collective decisions, or fishing people in the Lofoten Islands in the far north of Norway whose decision to use "inefficient" management and technologies allow them to preserve their fishing stock.

<sup>6</sup> The idea of struggle at the basis of the capital's dynamism comes from the early Italian workerism, and still constitutes one of the basic insights allowing a non-dogmatic interpretation of Marxian categories. See for example Tronti (1971), Cleaver (1979), De Angelis (2007).

<sup>7</sup> In De Angelis (2005) I engage with Holloway's argument and argue how the "no" always implies a "yes", and the latter is the ground for the social organisational work necessary in a process of constitution beyond capital.

<sup>8</sup> A classic example of this strategic recuperation is the contraposition between different models of economic management and their historical evolution, their becoming new orthodoxy at a moment of impasse of capitalist relation of production because of widespread struggles. Thus, post-war Keynesianism (promoting government active intervention for the promotion of "full employment", a welfare state, and the principle of increasing social wages tied to productivity) is opposed to neoliberalism (calling for austerity, (wage)-inflation fighting, and trickle down tax policy and an ideological anti-authoritarianism). See De Angelis (2000) for an account of this. Various studies also enable us to explain the formation of the wage hierarchy Federici (2004), the coexistence of relative and absolute surplus value strategies and the the inter-complementarities of "high" and "low" points of capitalist production Tomba (2007), Caffentzis (2002), Caffentzis and Federici (2007), the coexistence of enclosure processes and disciplinary markets at various level of capitalist development (De Angelis 2007). Moulner (1998) makes a very broad historical discussion of the history of the capitalist system, and argues that forms of enslaved labour have always played a fundamental role in capitalist accumulation, at whatever level of historical development.

<sup>9</sup> "The opening up of new markets, foreign or domestic, and the organizational development from the craft shop and factory to such concerns as U.S. Steel illustrate the same process of industrial mutation. . . that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly

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creating a new one. This process of Creative Destruction is the essential fact about capitalism. It is what capitalism consists in and what every capitalist concern has got to live in.” (Shumpeter 1975: 82)

<sup>10</sup> We must clarify this statement in two senses. First, the “fundamental role” is not an exhaustive role. As I argue in De Angelis (2007), capital must be understood as a relation of struggle, hence the production of value for capital is occurring through a clash among different value practices. Second, this implies that the important aspect of “control society” emphasised by post-workerist authors (Hartd and Negri 2000) following post-structuralist ones (Deleuze 1992) is the fact that disciplinary mechanisms are pervading the social field through the market, and are not only confined within specific architectural spaces (the factory, the prison etc.). But since disciplinary mechanisms constitute the production of capitalist values, then it follows that, contrary to the claims of the same authors, capital as social force has *still* a fundamental role in organising social production.

<sup>11</sup> For example, in London, the living wage is set by the Mayor for London office, and used as a campaign tool by trade unions of low paid workers. Its calculation is based on the assumption that the people working have full access to all entitlements that citizens do. Unfortunately, many of the low paid workers are illegal migrants who cannot access these benefits. The Living Wage so constructed therefore caps the wage demands at a level below the one required for “living” in London by a large chunk of London’s low paid workers.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of how the current graduate market is reaching saturation and hence putting downward pressure on graduate wages, see Taylor (2006).

<sup>13</sup> We must be careful to avoid simple linear correspondence between a national territory of a nation state and a field of exercise of sovereign power. Things are of course more complicated than this. For example, Rigo (2002) shows that the Europe of migratory flows is a global political space, since agreements for expulsion between EU nations and so-called “safe third countries” are in turn supplemented by agreements between these and non European nations. When we conceptualise modern borders therefore, it is important to keep this “flow of expulsion” and regulation in mind. Yet, for our purposes, whether the gates are provided by post-modern interlaced “smart fencing” or cold war types of big thick walls, the metaphor of a gated community is still relevant here.

<sup>14</sup> To assert this autonomy of the migrating subjects, is to move away from a discourse that regards them simply as victim, while emphasising that decisions to migrate might involve a search for liberty and emancipation from unfavourable conditions in particular places, *as much as* existential and “banal” reasons rooted in daily life. For a discussion see Mezzadra and Neilson (2003).

<sup>15</sup> The idea that the Middle Class is “oscillating” among different positions has a long pedigree, and was emphasised in different modalities since the very earlier Marxists and socialist thinkers were debating the virtues and defects of “reform” vs “revolution”. In Marx and Engels, the term took different meanings, at times referring to *the bourgeoisie*, at times referring to the middle strata leaving off revenue (rather

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than wages) and standing between workers on one hand and capitalists and landlords on the other, at times referring to the waged functionaries of capital replacing capitalists in their managerial and supervisory functions. In the earlier XX century, the classic position that the Middle Class was seen as a vestige of old feudal mode of production (as in György Lucacs), was starting to crack. Hence, whether the Middle Class was seen as a new Middle Class created by the desire of capitalists to “outsource” their work of administration and under the continuous danger of proletarianisation, (Kautsky), or as a result of the need to create markets for increased capitalist production (Bernstein), the middle social position of the Middle Class gave it a peculiar strategic potential for the revolutionary or reformist dreams of a generation of socialists. Bernstein for example saw a potential unification of “interests” which would have been achieved by the dual process of proletarianisation of parts of the new Middle Class and embourgeoisement of the Working Class. These combined processes, together with the “intermarriage” of the two classes, opened to the reformist road to socialism. For a review of these early debates, see Carter (1985).

<sup>16</sup> It is clear that “class” in general “is never of one mind” ( Ehrenreich 1989: 11). Barbara Ehrenreich puts it this way with respect to the 20% of American people that she classifies as professional Middle Class (from school teachers, to lawyers, academics, nurses and doctors and middle-high ranking managers): “Its only ‘capital’ is knowledge and skill, or at least the credentials imputing skill and knowledge. And unlike real capital, these cannot be hoarded against hard times, preserved beyond the lifetime of an individual, or, of course, bequeathed. The ‘capital’ belonging to the Middle Class is far more evanescent than wealth, and must be renewed in each individual through fresh effort and commitment. In this class, no one escapes the requirements of self-discipline and self-directed labor; they are visited, in each generation, upon the young as they were upon the parents. If this is an elite, then, it is an insecure and deeply anxious one. It is afraid, like any class below the most securely wealthy, of misfortunes that might lead to a downward slide. But in the Middle Class there is another anxiety: a fear of inner weakness, of growing soft, of failing to strive, of losing discipline and will. Even the affluence that is so often the goal of all this striving becomes a threat, for it holds out the possibility of hedonism and self-indulgence. Whether the Middle Class looks down towards the realm of less, or up toward the realm of more, there is the fear, always, of falling.” These might therefore be accounted as the psychological reasons for which alternatively the Middle Class is the party of “order” and of “betterment” through the wage hierarchy, and in particular moments it oscillates towards one or the other political spectrum: “So there is not, ultimately, an objective answer to the question of whether the Middle Class is an elite or something less exalted — an extension, perhaps, of the working class. And hence there is no easy answer to the much harder question of whether it is ‘naturally’ inclined to the left or to the right. Is the Middle Class, by nature, generous or selfish? Overindulged or aggrieved? Committed to equality or defensive of privilege? These are not only possible answers, but *choices* to be made.” (Ehrenreich 1989: 15) But these choices are contingent to a particular phase of capital accumulation, a particular global political economy within which whatever the right or left leaning, the Middle Class strive to reproduce itself as Middle Class. The point of the end of history therefore is this oscillation between “right” and “left” within the boundaries of systemic parameters.

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<sup>17</sup> According to some estimates, as for 2003, the ecological footprint has already “exceeded the earth biocapacity by about 25%” (WWF 2006: 2). The ecological footprint is the accounting tool measuring how much bioproductive land and sea resources is appropriated for human use in relation to how much is available on Earth. “A moderate business-as-usual scenario, based on United Nations projections showing slow, steady growth of economies and populations, suggests that by mid-century, humanity’s demand on nature will be twice the biosphere’s productive capacity. At this level of ecological deficit, exhaustion of ecological assets and large-scale ecosystem collapse become increasingly likely.” (ibid :2-3). On the other hand, if we were to take the extrapolation of Middle Class American dream seriously, and project for the world the current US level of bioproductive land and sea appropriation, we would require about 4.3 planets (WWF 2006: 3; computation from data supplied in table 1). For a review of the current methodologies used for the computation of ecological footprint see (Kitzes, Peller, Goldfinger, and Wackernagel 2007)

<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note how strategies of international development such as reforms of international financial architecture can be conceived as “middle-class-oriented development” since “access to reasonably priced, long-term credit is the single most important element in the formation of the middle-class”. This in turn can be seen to serve a stabilizing function over the social system: “extending the system of mass affluence found in the industrial economies into the developing world as rapidly as possible is the key to *global political stability* and economic growth.” (Mead and Schwenninger 2003: 3-4, my emphasis).

<sup>19</sup> See for example the discussion of precarious realities and organisation work in <http://www.chainworkers.org/>. For an analysis of the evolution of precarious work in Europe see Gray (2004).

<sup>20</sup> On this last point see for example Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002).