

The Ant Tribe

An investigation into modern precarity



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Abstract

Each year in China over two million graduates end up in the ever-growing group known as The Ant Tribe, consisting of hardworking graduates that cannot find permanent employment. Although a short period of internships and temporary jobs have been expected for the newly graduated, these have often functioned as a stepping-stone to a more permanent job with a pension and security. The problem, however, is that the temporary has become a permanent state. The graduates often have no prospect of recruitment, but can rather look forward to becoming project workers or academic day labourers who make up the core of the ‘precariat’ as described by Guy Standing. However, the precariat also contains individuals who are known as urban nomads, who choose to work as day labourers rather than being bound to a specific organisation or employment.

This thesis is an investigation into modern precarity, with a special emphasis on the educational system and the ambivalence of the precariat subjectivity, between exposure and opportunity, with regard to their search for work. The empirical data for this research is the documentary ‘*Education, Education*’, and will be analysed through the concepts of both Agamben and Derrida. More specifically, by applying Agamben’s concept of potentiality to rethink education from learning society to an act of study. Furthermore, Agamben’s notion of apparatus shows how modern employees must sacrifice their time and impotentiality in order to be included in the labour market. However, by focusing on pause as an act of profanation the precariat can deactivate the apparatus of the labour market. Using Derrida’s concept of pharmakon, the precariat figure’s ambiguity between exposure and opportunity is shown which can make Form-of-life as a politically ethical life possible.

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Introduction

Between jobs

The term ‘The Ant Tribe’ has become widely known across China, describing the large group of well above two million graduates yearly along with hardworking people who cannot find permanent employment that matches their academic qualifications - as in the case of Wan Chao from the documentary *Education, Education* (Chen, 2012). Despite the lack of job offers, these graduates choose to remain in the big cities instead of returning home in the hope of finding their dream job. Due to their financial situation, they are often found in windowless basements sharing a room and communal bathrooms with four to eight others. According to sociologist Lian Si, the comparison between these graduates and ants are: “*They share every similarity with ants. They live in colonies in cramped areas. They’re intelligent and hardworking, yet anonymous and underpaid*” (S. L. Hua, 2015). In order to survive, they often take jobs that differ from week to week and these could be anything from passing out fliers or delivering fast food. The lucky ones are on a trial period at an entry-level position relevant to their academic background, hoping to get permanent employment to justify their remaining in the cities (S. L. Hua, 2015).

Although graduates in Denmark may have better living conditions, certain similarities and parallels can be drawn with China. Often graduates in the country have to go through a long period of part-time jobs that are below their abilities, or being unemployed. Quite often, the unemployed describe their current situation as ‘between jobs’. To be unemployed can be viewed as a defeat, as a sign of not being proficient or adaptable enough in a world that is constantly changing. If one has not been able to keep a job and shows time between jobs they can be considered being incapable of writing an interesting job application, or worse still, just lazy (Redam, September 03, 2015). In the chronicle: "I am unemployed - not an idiot," which was released in Informationen Thomas Juhl describes how the pieces of advice he has received by his peers not only reduce the problem of unemployment to an individual problem to be addressed by the individual, but often trivialised reasons behind the many rejections he has received:

"Here are three concrete and truthful examples of advice I've gotten the last two months: *'Have you thought that it is a good idea to proofread your applications?'* "(Yes, I have thought of. I am scholar, damn, if there's anything I can do, then it is to read and reread texts). *'Have you thought that it is important not to get to write the name of a different company than the one you are looking at?'* "(No shit, Sherlock). *'Have you thought that you should remember to enclose your contact information when you submit an application?'* "(My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?)¹" (Juhl, June 15, 2015).

According to Juhl, the problem isn't that the unemployed are not capable of sufficiently presenting their skills, or they do not want to get a job because of the high social benefits, the problem is a lack of jobs on the market. Being between jobs also indicates another change, it is no longer a temporarily misfortunate situation or a state of exception, but rather it indicates a norm.

Thomas Juhl is one of the approximately 9,000 graduates since 2013 that have fallen out of the benefit system. After many applications, Juhl managed to get a job as a high school teacher, but only for six months. He foresees a life as an academic day labourer (Juhl, 04 September 2015). This describes Thomas' and many other scholars' lives that suggests a constant fluctuation between a temporary job and being between jobs. They must assume different responsibilities in several companies, without becoming too attached to the same place for long. They lead, in many ways, uncertain professional lives without the security of social services and safety. This new class of excluded people, who have not managed to secure an equal status in society, contains many people from different classes and backgrounds. Common to these individuals is a lack of social mobility, work safety and work identity (Standing, 2011: pp. 16-17). This is particularly true for the highly educated people who accept job offers that do not match either their skills nor expected payroll level, but they must accept in order to become part of society again. Juhl describes how his temporary employment will give him access to the wider community. Since he graduated, he has felt outside the community - where he can neither be labelled as a student, nor a worker. In other words, he feels characterless:

¹ Translated from Danish to English by Alia Mohammad

"One is not part of the society, but also not a stranger. One is in-between. The same feeling you can have as unemployed graduate. I'm no longer a student, a status I have valued and connected my very identity with, but I'm not working. I am not what I was, but not what I hoped to one day be. I am in-between. It's a scary feeling to no longer be categorized in a safe box "(Juhl, June 15, 2015)². Many unemployed feel outside the community when they can no longer contribute financially, whereby the work functions almost as an admission ticket to society. Society is thus a closed sphere which only includes people who are able to financially contribute (Plambech, June 16, 2015). Taking temporary work can thus become a necessary tool in order to maintain an, albeit, insecure, place in society.

The Precariat consists of precisely these individuals, who no longer have an identity in the labour market. They are in a grey area where they are not really considered equal citizens. Their vulnerability is not due to their low income, monetarily speaking, but rather because of the uncertainty and lack of security associated with their employment. Their work is not career enhancing, and they cannot carve out an identity outside their profession with corresponding practice, standards of conduct and ethics. What they are dealing with today will not help them build a long-term relationship, because there is no future in their work. Lack of membership of a professional society alienates and instrumentalises the individual from his surroundings. (Standing, 2014: p. 20). The part of the precariat which is formed by the well-educated are often frustrated and require a confrontation with the already established systems and thus pose the progressive subgroup (Christensen, November 05, 2014).

In relation to the state, Guy Standing represents this class of citizen as Denizen. The word is a contraction of denied and citizenship - that is denied citizenship, and is used to denote individuals who have fewer rights than common citizens of the state (Christensen, November 05, 2014). Agamben has, through his writings, also dealt with the concept Denizen as used for refugees who find themselves in a grey area where they can neither be sent home nor naturalised (Agamben, 2000). In many ways, the refugee should be the figure that best manifests human rights, but who often remains excluded: *"Here the paradox is that precisely the figure that should have embodied*

² Translated from Danish to English by Alia Mohammad

human rights more than any other – namely, the refugee – marked instead the radical crisis of the concept”. (Agamben, 2000; p. 19). However, this exclusion is always simultaneously an inclusion, because the immigrant is present as that which has been excluded, what Agamben refers to as an inclusive exclusion (Zembylas, 2010).

One can draw a parallel between, on the one hand, the refugee and the state and, on the other, society and the unemployed - or rather a day labourer. The welfare state was, in many ways, intended as a precaution against the exclusion of individuals based on their class. However, the reality is such that a large number of people daily feel excluded on the basis of their work, or the lack of it. The paradox can be found in that it is precisely those who would most benefit from the welfare society's ideals of equal opportunities and inclusion of all social classes still cannot accommodate a large heterogeneous class. However, the precarious class also embodies a group of individuals who are not seduced by full employment and job creation through growth. They are not looking for a life as a wage earner, but rather a life of urban nomads, where they have the freedom to work where they want without being morally bound to a particular organisation or employment - as in the post-Fordist project labour and creative class. Not everyone in the precarious class are therefore victims and vulnerable to the exploitation of labour. On the contrary, they are attracted by the freedom and lack of commitment to others (Standing, 2014: pp. 20-21). *”This precariat make up today's mass class and it is a class that can be politically dangerous because the precariat rejects the old party political agendas. But it is also a class that has political potential for change because the precariat aspires to be strong enough to abolish itself by eliminating inequality and insecurity conditions that define it”.*³ (Standing, G. April 26, 2014).

Thus holds the precarious class of political, economic and social potential, which has the potential to change the current labour market.

Thesis problem formulation

This paper will examine the subjectivity of the precarious worker as the ambivalence between exposure and opportunity in the late modern knowledge worker, with an emphasis on the commodification of education today and especially with regard to how it effects their search for a job.

³ Translated from Danish to English by Alia Mohammad

Method

The thesis will consist of three parts: the first section is an introduction to Guy Standing's book 'The Precariat' (2014), that diagnoses the causes and the issues faced by the precariat. Furthermore, there will also be a brief summary of the documentary *Education, Education* (Chen, 2012).

The second section of the thesis is concerned with the commodification of education. This section is important since the commodification of education is one of the main traps to a precarious existence that, according to Guy Standing (2014), are faced by youth. It includes a theory section, which will introduce Agamben's concept of *potentiality* and *impotentiality* more generally. Subsequently, this section will be concerned with the commodification of education looking at the case presented in the documentary (Chen, 2012), and Agamben's notion of potentiality and impotentiality. It is a reconsideration of the learning society, and the possibility of an education system that goes beyond development of competences and a mere means to an end.

The third section of the thesis will concern the question of the precariat figure as an ambivalent subject that embodies both exposure and opportunity by applying Derrida's notion of *pharmakon*, and how that affects the precariat's search for job. Prior to the analysis, there will be a general introduction to the following concepts: Agamben's concepts of Apparatus, sanctification, profanation and form-of-life, and Derrida's notions of deconstruction and *pharmakon*. The documentary *Education, Education* (Chen, 2012) will provide the empirical case for this section by looking at the apparatus of the labour market to better understand the process of sacrifice and de-subjectification that the individual has to undergo in order to be included in society. However, pause as an act of profanation deactivates the apparatus of sanctification in order for the individual to reconsider the values of performance society and its values.

Hermeneutic

The following section is about the methods, hermeneutic and phenomenology, and the empirical data chosen for the thesis, documentary film, and why they have been relevant for the examination of the commodification of education and the process of job-hunt, in other words the investigation of modern precarity.

The origins of the term hermeneutic can be traced back to the Greek god Hermes who supposedly was the inventor of language and functioned as an interpreter between the gods and humans (Botts, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). The starting point in hermeneutic is that we *interpret*, since a given phenomenon is experienced by an individual who assigns them with meaning. What becomes important then is how a person perceives a phenomenon and event based on their time and place. The researcher's job becomes to identify, interpret and analyse the hidden meaning and the significant of the opinions and meaning that are being studied. When analysing a text or other human actions it is simultaneously also an understanding of the author, or the actors, through the time when he or she lived. The researcher's own prejudice and perceptions are the starting point of the study, hence hermeneutic methodology doesn't consider science as value-free. That's because whenever the individual direct their attention and action towards something they already have an intention with the action (Egeholm, 2014; pp. 88-89).

Martin Heidegger and Hans-George Gadamer define hermeneutic as an understanding of existence and the world in general. The new formulation that both made was first and foremost that the interpreter and the interpreter's existence become a part of hermeneutics' basis, which meant that ontology became more important than former theories of hermeneutic. For Heidegger it became a question of what it means to be a human in the world in other words an existential philosophy. To understand and interpret is a necessary part of human existence. First and foremost one has to look at what it means to be and being embedded in the time (Jacobsen, 2015; 220-221).

Gadamer's key concepts are *preconception*, *situation*, *horizon*, *fusion of horizon*, and how the interpreter's prejudices play in important role. Whenever we approach and wish to interpret a phenomenon we have already an expectation and a preconception of the result. However the task is to be open to the *matter itself* and prepare to modify our preconception (Jacobsen, 2015; pp. 231-232). Preconception is closely related to the situation and horizon, because preconception is always effected by a situation, which will determine a horizon. Thereby preconception is the first step in the hermeneutic circle by giving an interpretation of the whole. Situation is something we are part of, and it effects and limits our field of view, namely horizon. The researcher must therefore try to look beyond his or hers own preconception by looking more closely to the field's historical situation and try to understand its horizons, this is what

he refers to as fusion of horizons: “*Language is the medium of hermeneutic, and fusion of horizon is created through conversation, which’s outcome is not known in advance*” (Jacobsen, 2015; pp. 232-233). The point is that interpretation should include the historical effects, and view horizon as the collective perspective that was characteristic for that time and social situation (Jacobsen, 2015; p 234). The subject field for hermeneutic is the humankind, culture and knowledge, who’s actions are purpose driven. Hermeneutical explanations are often contextual: “*Explains the human actions on the basis of the specific context in which they occur. This can include a description of the rules, institutions or cultural rationales that surround the individuals and prompt them to act as they do*”. (Egeholm, 2014; p. 95).

According to Gadamer the hermeneutics’ errand is to understand a given text better than the author (Jacobsen, 2015; p. 207) and to describe and explain contextually the opinions and the meaning that people attach to events and actions and not to question the validity of them. The researcher therefore describes states, and broader context in depth in order to account for their perception of actions and events, and highlights how phenomenon is part of a broader context (Egeholm, 2014; p. 96). The process of understanding a text hermeneutically is referred to as the *hermeneutic circle*. This process describes cyclic movement between the individual part and the whole. How the understanding of a text as whole is based on an understanding of the individual part, and the understanding of the individual part requires an understanding of the whole (Egeholm, 2014; pp. 90, 99).

The approach of this thesis is hermeneutic, which means that the empirical data, Education, Education, was interpreted through a constant exchange between the specific scenes as presented by the documentary and the more social and global phenomenon of the precariat. The description and the later interpretations of the scenes are based on the view of the individual as a historical and contextual being, whose actions and decisions are effected by rules, cultural rationales and institutions.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology and hermeneutic are related in certain philosophical direction and forms of qualitative research, where the aim is to understand human thought, feelings and experience of their own situation and intentions (Jacobsen, 2015; p. 241). Phenomenology is interested in describing and understanding how a given

phenomenon and the world manifest themselves to the individual, while hermeneutic aim is to describe and understand interpretations. The subject of phenomenology is human consciousness and knowledge of a given phenomenon and how it manifests itself to the individual. The nature of the phenomenon is understood through the intentions, that effect the attention and the actions of the individual (Egeholm, 2014; pp. 102-104).

Early phenomenology is considered to be founded by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, who studied the different modes of conscious experience, which are always driven by an *intention: a phenomenon is therefore always something for someone* (Egeholm, 2014; pp. 104-105). In other words phenomenology is the study of different experience structures, which involve intentionality such as thought, feelings, memories, perceptions and bodily sensations, therefore is based on the *first-person-perspective* (Egeholm, 2014; p. 105). Martin Heidegger also have played an important role in further development of phenomenology, where the main point is that all human experience is connected to the meaning that has been interpreted through language, which allows us access to human reality and experience. To understand a given phenomenon thoroughly one must look closer at how it manifests itself to individuals in varies ways under different situations. As mentioned before it is important to account for the experience, feeling and associations with and event because they are part of it and cannot, as otherwise claims by the objective approach, be separated form the event (Egeholm, 2014; pp. 106-109). The researcher must first and foremost point at the individual's intention and direction, in order to understand the phenomenon. The main point of phenomenology is that the subject's social, cultural and physical mode of being in the world is what determines what the world is capable of being therefore the subject and the world cannot be separated (Egeholm, 2014; p. 109). The term *epoché* refers to the researchers role, who must during data gathering put their own understanding to side in order to focus on the individuals understanding and intentions rather than the researcher's interpretation (Egeholm, 2014; pp. 112-114). In relation to the thesis, there will be a description of different situation from the participants' perspectives in order to get a better understanding how events in relation to education, job-hunt and being an employee manifests themselves to the individuals. This would help to better understand the nature of these phenomenon on the basic of how they effect the attention and actions of the individual.

Empirical data

The main empirical data source of this thesis is the 58 minutes long documentary titled; '*Education, Education*' directed by Weijun Chen in 2012. The documentary is part of eight films that aim to research the various causes of poverty and to narrate these reasons through *bold and factual films* (Why poverty?, 2014) Quantitative and qualitative methods such as interviews are by many believed to give a better insight to the research field. In fact research on film as an empirical data is still unusual, but over the last period of time films and images have become more and more common and accepted as data in understanding the research field (Sørensen, 2014; p. 6). Because films and images provide the researcher with illustrative and richer narratives and symbols of how an issue is perceived and interpreted by the participants in the documentary. By using film as data one can get varied and richer descriptions and interpretations of the same social and economical issue. According to Rhodes and Parker, this is because popular culture has greater impact on everyday language than bestseller books (Godfrey, 2012; p. 547).

Documentary and narrative fiction as data help to provide the researcher with insight into ambiguous, complicated and distinctive interpretation of the social order, which matches the world beyond the film itself (Foreman, 1996; p. 45). In other words the documentary provides the researcher a richer and diverse narrative of education and job hunting. That is not to say that the camera didn't have an effect on the participants, in terms of a certain performance due to the presence of the camera. The documentary has provided with narratives of a student, a graduate and a tutor who altogether help to give a better understanding of the role of education and the process of job hunt, and the meaning they attach to their situation and actions. The documentary also allows the viewer access to the participants during different locations, times and circumstances in order to make a better understanding of how different institutions and even rooms affect the subject's actions. The scenes were chosen based on different parameters:

In case of the student, scenes that had significance for her choice of education and college were chosen in order to get a better understanding of the underlying perception of education. The graduate's scenes were mostly chosen on the basis of the exposure and the vulnerability he was exposed to and how these situations manifest themselves to him.

Part 1:

Introducing the Precariat

Guy Standing (1948) is an English professor of Development Studies and has spent much of his time analysing the labour market conditions through empirical data gathered from around the world. He is one of the main figures to discuss the creation of a new class, namely the precariat. Through his work, he highlights the historical developments and causes of the precariat, without underemphasising his critique of capitalism or his own political views (Christensen, November 05, 2014).

In the following, there will be a historical review on the consequences of globalisation and the making of the precariat. This will be followed by a loose definition of the precariat and the new-class-in-the-making. Finally, a description of Standing's view on how the precariat can become progressive and manage to change its position in the society, by going from denizen to full citizen, will be offered.

The making of the Precariat: The Global transformation

Foxconn is the world's largest contract manufacturer, which employs 900,000 people in China alone. Most of their employees are rural-urban migrants who work for very low wages and undertake 36 hours' monthly overtime in the Foxconn city in Shenzhen. The city itself contains many buildings where each is dedicated to one customer. These customers are some of the largest American, European and Japanese electronic and information technology companies such as Apple, Dell and Sony (Standing, 2014: p. 48). The working conditions of these employees were brought to the world's attention in 2009 and 2010 by a series of suicides and attempted suicides among the workers. Foxconn's immediate reaction was to put a safety net around the buildings to catch the workers if they jump, and hire Buddhist monks to calm them, but eventually Foxconn also raised wages. According to Standing, the Foxconn case is a metaphor for globalisation. Accordingly, the company will now cut enterprise benefits and move production to other areas with lower costs and more precarious employees: *the great engine of outsourcing will outsource itself* (Standing, 2014: p. 49).

Guy Standing argues that the era of globalisation (1975-2008) was one where the financier and neo-liberal economists attempted to create a global market economy that

was built on individualism and competitiveness (Standing, 2014: p. 43). This development was partly made possible by the Italian workers' resistance to the Fordist rationalisation of work. It was a leap from Fordist to Post-Fordist era arising from an educated labour-power that no longer wished to follow the same work ethics and customs of assembly-line workers (Virno, 2004; pp. 12 & 98-100). The capital reacted by moving many of its factories and production from Europe to other parts of the world in order to increase yield and profits (Jakobsen, 2014; pp. 8-10). The emergence of newly industrialising countries such as China and India (Chindia), which could provide low-cost labour put competitive pressure on industrialised countries. One of the main consequences of globalisation is that almost every aspect of life can be viewed as a commodity, even the family, education system, disability, labour institutions and unemployment. Through commodification everything becomes subject to market forces, where they can be bought and sold with prices set by demand and supply. Firms have also become a commodity like other goods, and are bought and sold through mergers and acquisitions by foreign shareholders. This affects the commitment and the bond between the owners and the employees, since employees find themselves in insecure positions where they can lose their jobs overnight. On the other hand, companies also wish for more flexible employees in order to become better at responding to external threats. Standing argues that the pursuit of flexible labour relations is one of the main causes of the growth in precariat. This is an example of labour re-commodification *making the labour relationship more responsive to demand and supply, as measured by its price, the wage* (Standing, 2014: pp. 52-53). Quite often experts and commentators have argued that reducing the employment security, which will make it easier to dismiss employees, increases jobs. In the following, there will be an examination of the three main forms - numerical, functional and wage - of flexibility that accelerates the growth of the global precariat.

Numerical flexibility

In the 1960s, an employee could expect to have around four employers by the time he retired, which allowed him to identify with his workplace. Typically, a worker today is most likely to have around nine employers before becoming 30, *that is the extent of the change represented by the numerical flexibility* (Standing, 2014: p. 62). Often mainstream companies keep a small number of salariat, corporate citizens, with whom they share knowledge, and whose loyalty is important and valuable to the company. An

ever-growing number of the labour-power, however, comes from temporary labour. They help the company to adapt and adjust their division quickly, but temporary labour also reduces costs. With temporary labour comes lower wages, lack of health insurance and paid vacations and other enterprise benefits. Temporary workers, moreover, lose all control over time when they offer their labour as a commodity to the hands of temping agencies, since they have to be available nearly all the time. Working as a temp also reduces the employer's cost of ending contracts. The relationship between the temporary employee and the employers is rather uneven and therefore employees can be pressured into working more for less in order to keep their jobs. According to Standing, this is the route to second-class citizenship and employment insecurity (Standing, 2014: pp. 58,62). Part-time jobs are another aspect of numerical flexibility partly because of the changing position of women, and partly involuntary, since many need to work part-time in order to cover their expenses. One must note that the term 'part time' can be misleading since often the employee is expected to work full-time hours (Standing, 2014: p. 60).

Functional flexibility

Due to global competition and rapid technological development, companies want to be able to change the division of labour and shift workers between tasks, positions and workplaces without costs and delay. This entails the essence of functional flexibility, which intensifies job insecurity. The question then becomes (Standing, 2014: p. 63): *How can people construct a career and build an occupational profile when they can be moved at short notice or when the next rungs on an occupational ladder are suddenly outsourced?* Switchability may be desirable for the management team, but renders it nearly impossible for the employee to build a career under highly insecure working conditions. The reduction of unions and collective bargaining has led to individualised contracts, where firms provide different treatments, degrees of security and status to divide the employees into different groups from salariat to precariat status (Standing, 2014: p. 63). Some of the same components, such as individual contracts, of external flexibility can be found in another useful, if clumsy, term namely 'tertiarisation' which can be summed up as: *...a combination of forms of flexibility in which division of labour are fluid, workplaces blend into home and public places, hours of labour fluctuate and people can combine several work statuses and have several contracts currently. Is ushering a new system of control... from direct control to diverse forms of*

indirect control, in which increasingly sophisticated technological mechanisms are deployed (Standing, 2014: pp. 64-65). The discussions about ‘work-life balance’ therefore no longer appear necessary since the distinction between home and workplace itself seems blurred. Many bring elements of their home with them to work while they work from home, café and other locations (Standing, 2014: p. 202).

Wage system flexibility

There is a different wage system for the employees based on the nature of their contracts. While the wages of permanent workers have risen, the opposite is the case for temps, who, unlike the salariat, rely on money wages. The salariat and proletariat also shifted from wages to enterprise and state benefits such as paid medical leave, subsidised housing and transport and much more, as long as they remained compliant. The growing group of precariat is deprived and denied entitlement to all these benefits, and all the while, their wages are typically lower, more unpredictable and variable (Standing, 2014: pp. 69-75). In other words, unlike both the salariat who have enterprise benefits that give income security and the proletariat with their social protection, the precariat relies solely on low wages and weakened community support (Standing, 2014: p. 76).

The public sector and how it is growing the precariat

In the period that followed the recent recession, many right-wing parties argued that the public sector was too big and had to be downsized. Therefore, many governments started to act like commercial firms by seeking employee flexibility and outsourcing many of their tasks to the private sector. In the US, the government is saving on office spaces by decentralising and flexibilising the labour of their employees. However, this is precariatization because it isolates the employees and limits their opportunity for collective action (Standing, 2014: p. 90-91). In the time after the crisis, many governments offered different kinds of subsidies that primarily benefited the rich and firms. In the UK, companies were offered subsidies if they would temporarily hire or just train people who had been out of work for more than six months. This created a system where companies were tempted to dismiss their existing workers in order to take in substitutes, offering them only temporary jobs and thereby enlarging the precariat (Standing, 2014: p. 94). Combining short-term labour with government subsidies is one of the ways through which full-time employees become subsidised

part-time members of the precariat. These workers, in many cases will eventually become full-time unemployed due to the short lifespan of short-time subsidies (Standing, 2014: p. 95).

Precarious unemployment

There has been a change in attitude towards unemployment, from an unfortunate situation brought forth by being at the wrong place at the wrong time, to being a self-inflicted situation. Unemployment in a neo-liberal framework became a matter of individual responsibility, where the unemployed is viewed as lazy and a freeloader, or at best less employable and therefore needing to update their skills. This view affected the unemployment benefits, where the middle-class commentators argued that work did not pay and therefore the unemployment benefits should be cut, only given to the few who have proven to deserve it, forcing the unemployed to take poorly paid and unpleasant jobs (Standing, 2014: pp. 76-79). US studies show that taking temporary jobs after periods of unemployment tends to lower annual income and long-term earnings: *This is the reason for the unemployed to resist pressure to take the first job offered to them. It is not laziness or scrounging but merely common sense* (Standing, 2014: p. 81). Being unemployed is also experienced as a form of tertiarisation, hence they have multiple 'workplaces' from benefit offices, job-search training offices to filling forms and commuting in search for job. In other words, being unemployed is a full-time job.

Labour or Work?

This leads to a question about the nature of work and the distinctions that have been made between work and labour over time. Hannah Arendt, a twentieth-century political philosopher, argues for a tripartite division of human activities between labour, work and action, arranging them in an ascending hierarchy of importance (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Hannah Arendt notes that often historians mistakenly think that labour and work were despised in the ancient Greek because they were reserved for slaves. Arendt, in contrast, argues that slavery was justified and defensible because labour serves the needs for the continuation of life, hence *to labour meant to be enslaved by necessity* (Arendt, 1998; p. 83). The slaves were used as a tool to eliminate or exclude what man shares with other animals, since that was not considered human (Arendt, 1998; p. 84). What sets work apart is that, unlike labour, it has a clear

beginning and an end in the fabrication process, while labour is a cyclical movement of human biological processes. Everything that Homo faber creates, can be destroyed by him without affecting his life processes, making him a master or lord of himself and his doings since he is free to produce and free to destroy (Arendt, 1998; p. 144). Work was viewed as a praxis and was performed for its use value closely related to social relationships such as caring for others and preparing them for a life in the city, *polis*. However, labour, on the other hand, was performed by slaves and outsiders who were considered to have little time left to engage in the matters of the *polis*, hence they were denied citizenship. The division of time between labour, work, play and leisure drawn by Ancient Greece is a useful one, despite what one might think of their treatment of slaves and women (Standing, 2014: pp. 200-201).

Later, through the modern age, a distinction between productive and unproductive labour arose and was at the heart of Adam Smith's and Karl Marx's arguments. They both agreed on despising unproductive labour, viewing it as a perversion of labour because it did not enrich the world or leave anything behind in return for consumption. However, in exchange for their consumption, these household inmates enabled their masters to be free or potentially productive. Labour can therefore be viewed as that which leaves nothing behind and whose efforts are consumed almost immediately (Arendt, 1998; pp. 85-87). Virno argues that even throughout the Fordist era, the distinction between labour, action and intellect seemed indisputable. However, with the rise of the post-Fordist era the repartitioning seems to be in crisis (Virno, 2004; p. 49). According to Arendt, this is because the line or the difference between labour and work has become more blurred due to the movement of labour from the private realm to the public and due to the modern age's ability to organise and divide it. Furthermore, what is significant is the productivity of labour, despite its futility of products, found in human power that can produce more than what is needed for its own personal survival or reproduction. The surplus of human "labour power" is the explanation of labour's productivity that produces nothing but life - unlike work, which can add new objects to the human artifice (Arendt, 1998; p. 88). According to Standing, this amalgamation between labour and work devalues some of the most important and beneficial activities that serve our social existence (Standing, 2014: pp. 201-202). What we have in our contemporary society is Arendt's nightmare because, when labour moves to the public realm, it requires visibility, networking and project labourers' precariat; everything is a

means to different ends. The public realm is now concerned with production and not much is left outside labour and the necessities of life. This limits our possibility and space for political action (Carnera, February 2016). Nonetheless, labour is not the only work we do today. Much of our time must be spend mangling, networking, training and developing our skills to ensure our positions in the firm all the while keeping some other doors open in case they prove useful. Work-for-labour also covers the time one uses looking for a job or state benefits when unemployed (Standing, 2014: pp. 206-207).

Urban nomads

What sets the precariat apart from other classes is the plurality of its members, since everybody could potentially enter the precariat. However, the reasons might vary, from unfortunate circumstances to lack of alternatives, along with some choosing to be in it instrumentally as a way of making extra money or as a combination with other activities, such as seen in Japan, for example (Standing, 2014: pp 101). However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to include every variation, hence three large groups have been chosen: the students or youths, the old agers and the immigrants. The focus of the analysis however would be the student and youths.

Youth make up the core of the precariat. This is because they are more likely to enter a precarious existence than most other groups, as they typically have to enter the labour force after school or graduation by taking up precarious positions. This has always been the case for the newly graduated, expecting a period of short-term contracts and being an outsider; however, what has changed is that they are no longer given a reasonable bargain. The period of time during which firms can legally give lower wages and fewer benefits has stretched far beyond the time needed in order to establish employability. The prospect of becoming a member of the long-term contract group is ever declining, leaving many youth frustrated and vulnerable to poverty, though those with a degree may have better chances of moving into a more permanent or long-term position (Standing, 2014: pp. 112-113).

Youth today face three main challenges, for different reasons: such as the recession, their parents have lost statue, income and stability; they no longer have role models to mirror; and they fall into precarity traps with low-paying jobs that offer little to furthering their career. The youth of today are the children of the 1980s generation who

were first to be subjected to systematic flexibility. *There is a sense of downwardness, matched by what they see ahead of them* (Standing, 2014: p. 115).

One of the other reasons for frustration among the youth is the commodification of education. Over time, there have been periods where universities have been sold as a commodity, but the barrier between universities and the market has never been more blurred, where even the language that researchers and lecturers use to describe their academic activities is characterised by a neo-liberal discourse (Caffentzis in Jakobsen, 2014; p 130). In 2009, the responsibility for universities in UK was moved from the education department to the department for business, where the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills stated: *“I want the universities to focus more on commercialising the fruits of their endeavour... business has to be central”* (Lord Mandelson in Standing, 2014: p. 117). Similar development is found in Denmark where the government has passed successive legislation in order to bring the universities closer to a more economic standard, which led the students at Aarhus University to carry out a *‘silent protest against the business sector’s dominance’*⁴ in 2014 (Jakobsen, December 22, 2014). Education is sold as a commodity and investment, which will improve one’s chances of getting high-income jobs. However, the majority will take jobs beneath their qualifications and do not have a prospect of getting a permanent position in the immediate future, and all the while left in debt (Standing, 2014: p. 116).

Several international universities around the world are offering courses online, minimising contact between teacher and students. The University of the People offers tuition-free Bachelor degrees, where students teach their fellow students online (Standing, 2014: p. 118). Many politicians and financial institutions encourage that education should focus on economics and employability *instead of learning about culture and history, children must be taught how to be efficient consumers and jobholders* (Standing, 2014: p. 118). Acquiring real skills has become of less importance in comparison to acquiring more certificates that just might help one to get the next job. This is one of the processes that generates the precariat, by maximising profit based on the numbers of certificates issued. The problem is that education is being sold as an investment good, but fails to give the promised return - leading more

⁴ Translated from Danish to English by Alia Mohammad

people to enter the precariat feeling angry and disappointed (Standing, 2014: p. 123).

The current situation leaves youths vulnerable and at risk of entering the two main precarity traps after graduating. The first is the debt trap, which they will try to pay off through temporary and low-wage jobs. The second is where the youth are torn between two poles, on the one hand, the need for an income, and on the other, such temporary jobs might slow down their prospects of obtaining a career-building position. Often they are tempted or told to work as interns for companies in order to become more employable and broaden their network. However, it is rare that an internship results in an actual job offer, but instead is merely a cheap and easily disposable workforce for companies. Consequently, interns become a precariat substitute for standard labour (Standing, 2014: pp. 128-130).

Other groups also competing with the youth and entering the precariat existence include the growing numbers of old agers, the disabled, inmates and emigrants. The old agers can be divided in two subgroups: groaners and grinners. The former needs a source of income to meet his or her financial needs, such as health insurance and rents and will therefore take the low-wage temporary jobs. The latter, in contrast, does so in order to combine their pension with a part-time job, and does not need long-term career building opportunities. These jobs were taken for the sake of their simplicity, allowing them to focus more on their personal aspects of life. Both groups of the old agers are competing with the youth over the few job opportunities, since firms can hire them for smaller wages and lower benefits (Standing, 2014: pp. 135-146). While the number of old agers is growing due to longer life expectancy and better general health, more and more adults are being diagnosed with different kinds of physical and mental illnesses. *This is how disability and the precariat come together. Those identified as different are not only more likely to find life opportunities restricted to precarious options, but they are also more likely to be pushed that way* (Standing, 2014: pp. 148-149). Employees with episodic disabilities are seen as less reliable by the firms and are therefore not hired on long-term contracts and thus drift into precarious jobs. At the same time, they also face barriers in the welfare system and do not get the same state benefits as others.

As mentioned, the emigrant makes up a large share of the precariat, but the emigrant figure invokes a long-neglected term, namely the denizen. A denizen, as distinct from a

citizen, is an alien who is not entitled to the same benefits and rights. It follows the same logic as the ancient Roman idea that someone could be granted the right to live in a place but not to participate in the political life. Furthermore, citizens do not have to fear the possibility of being deported or exiled. Some emigrants today may have the *de jure* rights but are nonetheless excluded from them *de facto* (Standing, 2014: p. 163). In the modern day, many people are being ‘de-citizenised’ in their own country, where they are excluded from certain rights and benefits, and lack security and opportunity for full membership; *belonging to the community into which one is born no longer a matter of course and not belonging no longer a matter of choice* (Arendt in Standing, 2014: p. 193). To the firms, the emigrants represent cheap workforces that are sometimes paid less than half of that of natives or citizens. This creates a tension between the two groups where the emigrants are accused of ‘stealing’ jobs from the citizens. The tension is only intensified with the middle-class feeling that the bills of poor emigrants are paid through the tax-based social assistance system. All the while they too are at risk of entering the precariat existence due to decline in social mobility chapter. However, in order to temporarily please the middle-class politicians blame and demonise two groups: both the emigrants and the “lazy” unemployed, rather than blaming the nature of the flexible labour market (Arendt in Standing, 2014: p. 194).

The Panopticon Trend

The demonisation of these different groups has led to the legitimacy of monitoring them in varied ways. For example, the poor must make sure that their children are sent to school every day or they will lose their state benefits. In some company towns, workers are being watched for undesirable behaviours, which will be punished through penalties. The inspiration for these surveillance techniques that can be found in schools, factories and social institutions, can be found in Jeremy Bentham’s famous panopticon paper (1787) where he described an ideal prison as being where the guard would be in a central watchtower capable of observing every prisoner. However, in contrast, the prisoners were incapable of seeing the guard and therefore acted as if they were always being watched. He used the term ‘an architecture of choice’ where the prisoner appeared to be offered a choice, yet if he made the wrong one he would be punished through solitary confinement. Ever since, his design has been used by different agencies and organisations to monitor both citizens and employees in order that they make the ‘right’ decisions (Standing, 2014: pp. 228-229).

One could argue that the social media and Google have become the modern version of the panopticon, where the line between the private and the public sphere is becoming ever more blurred due to new apps and functions that allow one to share everything from location to moods and emotions with everyone online. The problem is that much of this information is gathered without our knowledge and is shared without our consent with different commercial companies. Employers can gather personal information about a possible candidate for a job with a brief search on Facebook. The privacy settings do not work as efficiently as one could have hoped, and often very personal information and even pictures can be moving around the Internet without one's knowledge. This information could be anything from vacation pictures and leisure activities to political and religious views that, for example, could make one seem more or less desirable for a given position in a company and thus affect one's employability (Standing, 2014: pp. 230-233).

Social networks and the Internet are not the only mechanisms of surveillance and discipline. There are currently many researchers trying to find the code to the perfect employee by studying DNA and Hormone levels. For example, a study shows that high levels of testosterone goes with risk seeking and the desire to dominate. The level of one's testosterone is closely connected to the way one lives. These studies are likely to lead to social engineering (Standing, 2014: pp. 234-235).

Defining the Precariat

These groups show the diversity of the precariat, indicating that it does not consist of people from identical backgrounds, but rather it includes many more groups than mentioned. One could say that different degrees of insecurity and attitudes towards a precariat existence constitute varieties of precariat. Generally, one could define the precariat as a distinctive socio-economic group; this description can be viewed as the 'ideal type' and is useful in terms of analysis and images (Standing, 2014: p. 11). What is special about the precariat, however, is that unlike the salariat, it is composed of people who have minimal trust relationships with the state and capital. While it has none of proletariat's securities ensured through contracts, it has its own structure of social income that is beyond the monetary income received at a given time. Therefore, what defines the precariat is not its level of income or money wages, but rather the lack of community support, and decreased access to enterprise or state benefit in times of

need. Work-based identity is another element missing in the precariat, since it is employed temporary and in career-less jobs, without a feeling of belonging to a professional community, codes of conduct and ethics (Standing, 2014: p. 20). There is no denying that some in the precariat enter it freely, because they reject the rules and the norms of the old working class or the white-collar' jobs of the salariat. Although rejecting the old ways has always been a part of the youth, what is different here is that even the old agers aim for such an existence after decades of stable labour (Standing, 2014: p. 15). Consequentially, it is difficult to give a precise figure for the precariat, but it is important to highlight that it means being in a position that has no prospect of a career or professional identity, nor any entitlement to state or enterprise benefits.

As a class, the precariat is one in the making but not quite a class-for-itself (Standing, 2014: pp. 11, 42). Although many Marxist critiques argue that not much has changed and that the precariat is not a distinct class, G. Standing highlights that over the years there has been a change from national industrial capitalism to a global capitalism. Therefore, the simple distinction between the workers and the capitalists no longer applies. The precariat is a new class in the making, which has its own insecurities and demands and should not simply be reduced to a lower working class or the squeezed middle. If they become well organised the precariat can bring forth the Good Society of the twenty-first century. (p. x-xi). Alternatively, in the worst-case scenario, the precariat will be the phase of primitive rebels, when protests and reactions are from people who know more about what they are against than what they believe in. (p. vii). This is partly because the precariat is under a great deal of time stress and has a different view of leisure that effects democracy and changes society. The time spent on work-for-labour means that we do not have a useful narrative when explaining how we manage our time and what we are doing with it. The precariat can be seen working in cafés or other public places at odd times. It is not a paid labour but one that is necessary. The precariat can no longer participate fully in leisure activities, visiting museums, listening to music and so forth because it has limited access to these activities and because it is time ill spent since it does not make them more employable or develop their skills. This means that the large group of society that falls under the precariat can rarely participate in political activities, because there is always something else that needs to be taken care of at the same time. Hence, *the time squeeze turns leisure into a jeopardised part of life and leads to 'thin democracy', in which people*

are disengaged from political activity, except when motivated for a short while... (Standing, 2014: p. 225). This means that the precariat has to multitask, whereby his/her attention is divided between several tasks and therefore he/she cannot fully concentrate on one task at any one time. This affects the precariat's ability to be creative, since he or she cannot fully devote himself or herself to one project (Standing, 2014: pp. 214-225).

As mentioned, the precariat is not yet a class-for-itself, and that is partly because it is in war with itself, since one group blames another for its current situation and vulnerability. For example, some in the low-income areas might blame the emigrants for taking their jobs. This is primarily because after the recession governments have constantly demonised 'criminals', 'disabled', 'emigrants' and the 'welfare claimants' (Standing, 2014: p. 251). This makes the precariat dangerous because some of it can be attracted to populist and neo-fascist messages and politicians. This, according to G. Standing, necessitates a 'politics of paradise', which will respond to its fears and insecurities (Standing, 2014: p. 42).

Politics of Paradise

Although the precariat is not a class-for-itself, it is ready to identify what it does and does not want and therefore it is a class-in-the-making; *It needs to revive an ethos of social solidarity and universalism, values rejected by the utilitarian* (Standing, 2014: p. 268). Universalism is about overcoming distinctions by uniting the denizens and insists for full citizenship for all society's members, including emigrants and criminals. Moreover, it also needs economical securities to withstand unpredictable shocks and hazards, which will give a sense of control back to the precariat achieved through income securities. There is, however, a need for the precariat to find 'agency' to represent their collective and individual interests. The commodification of education and universities has, according to Standing, to be stopped. It is of utmost importance that universities liberate education for its own sake, where professionals and academics determine the content and students should be involved by allowing them to shape the structure and the objectives. The aim of the educational system should be to produce *capable and cultivated human beings* (Standing, 2014: pp. 274-276).

Work must be redefined and rescued from jobs and labour, where it can be respected. The assumption that someone without job is not working, or worse is lazy, should also

be eliminated. One could be temporarily idle, only to regenerate. Jobs and labour are important aspects of our lives but they are not all of life, nor are they the source of happiness, nor do they define us. By advocating this policy most people are bound to fall short of these expectations and this will leave us stressed and dissatisfied (Standing, 2014: p. 242-243). Other forms of work without exchange value can also be of great importance both to the individual and the society, and thereby *insist on a richer concept of work*. In other words, *we must stop making a fetish of jobs* (Standing, 2014: pp. 277, 281). In order to be truly free, the precariat needs its community since according to Standing, freedom is revealed through actions exercised in it. Therefore, the precariat needs a collective voice that is well prepared to bargain with employers and policy makers. Firstly it should be freed from surveillance and undemocratic coercion, where the individuals know what information organisations hold on them (Standing, 2014: p. 288-289).

Standing argues that every transformation in any given era has been marked by a struggle over the key assets. In today's society, there will be a struggle of control over the following five primary assets: *economic security, time, quality space, knowledge and financial capital*. The redistribution of these five assets will require institutional changes, regulations and bargaining (Standing, 2014: pp. 294-295). The basic income is an idea that could help in all respects. It will ensure every legal resident of the country or community a basic security. This includes both children and adults, and will be paid in cash to every individual regardless of income. This will give people the freedom to live in any way they see fit. It will help to broaden our understanding of work to also include all that is not labour.

There should be no trouble in funding a basic income in both rich and developing countries. It is a political challenge; hence the precariat needs to put pressure on politicians to make it a reality. It is a necessary tool in order to give people more control over time. Time spent on work-for-labour, to slow down and live outside the market. Consequentially, people will have more time to participate in matters of the *polis*, which will then empower democracy. Furthermore, it will give the employees a bargaining tool, where employers will no longer be able to push the wages down (Standing, 2014: pp. 307-308).

Education, Education

'Education, Education' is a 2012 Chinese documentary directed by Weijun Chen. The movie is about the educational system in China and the changes it has undergone. In the past, education was the best way to get out of poverty in China; therefore, many parents still push their children to get a degree in order to get better job and life standards. However, education might just be one of the best ways to ensure a lifetime in debt for these students. In 1997, the Chinese government privatised universities and thereby turned education and college certificates into a commodity that can be bought. The state-subsidised universities are the best but require a good result on the University Entrance Exams Day. Those who perform poorly can therefore go to more expensive private universities. Some of these privatised colleges strategically target poor and rural families because they are more likely to be fooled by their promises. Each year more than two million graduates in China cannot find work and are known as '*The Ant Tribe*'⁵. The movie follows three individuals at three different stages of life: the student Wang Pan, the college tutor Wang Zhenxiang and the newly graduated Wan Chao.

The tutor Wang Zhenxiang is a Graphic Design graduate that now works as a teacher in Hongbo College. During the summer vacation, he has to spend seven weeks driving around the country trying to recruit students for the college. His target is that at least eleven must sign up and pay their joining fee. According to him the best way to start the presentation is by telling a little story, which will leave the parents emotional and therefore more responsive. He then continues to explain how education is their best chance of having a better life: "*University is your best way out. Would you agree with me?*" to which they all answer "yes" and he continues, "*In China it is the only way. There is an old saying, learning is the noblest of pursuits*" (Chen, 2012). Wang explains how city schools have better resources, and get better results on the tests due to better teachers and schools, while students from rural areas are left with poor quality schools and teaching. They have rarely, if not ever, seen a computer let alone know how to use it, which explains why it is so easy for colleges like Hongbo to fool them. However, it also effects their future careers since they are most likely not to be taught how to use a computer and do simple office jobs. He further explains the nature of these colleges; "*we are a private enterprise and not really a college. Strictly speaking it is a company. We attract the students, get their fees and send them on their way*"

⁵ <http://www.whypoverty.net/video/education-education/>

(Chen, 2012). Hongbo College alone has made 50 million yen on their 5000 students, which makes Wang say; *“in China education is a lucrative industry”* (Chen, 2012). Throughout the movie, it becomes clear that Wang is burdened with guilt and calls his job immoral.

At the end of the movie, his work leads him to Wang Pan, who is a student trying to enter a college. Unfortunately, Wang Pan has not done very well on her university entrance exam, and must therefore choose one of the private colleges. She wants to go to college because according to her *“to study is to escape poverty”* and is her only opportunity to get a decent job in the future and improve both hers and the family’s living standards (Chen, 2012). In order to pay for her fees her parents throw her a party and the guests give money as a going away gift. In order to decide which college and study programme to choose Wang Pan goes to the tutor’s presentation. After they meet, Wang hurries back to his hotel because he wants to avoid further meetings with the families of the area. At the hotel while taking off his tie he says *“let me transform back into a human.”* *“I don’t think the girl (Wang Pan) should register with us. They are so poor. Where is our consciousness”* as he struggles under the weight of his backpack (Chen, 2012). Wang Pan ends up in Changjiang Technical College where she wants to study engineering. Hongbo College closes, after the owner escapes with the money leading to Wang taking a new job as a IT security specialist.

Wan Chao is a recent graduate from Luojia College and has majored in International Finance and Trade and has also studied accounting. Since his graduation, he has struggled to find a job. He goes to many career fairs trying to get a job interview. Eventually, he is offered a week’s trial at a company after which they will determine whether or not he gets to the probation period, which would last three months. Unfortunately, due to his lack of experience in using Excel he is asked to leave. This puts him in a terrible position since he would no longer manage to pay rent or buy food. The problem, according to Wan, is that looking for work is both time consuming and very expensive. After the second job interview, he dines with the others who like him are also looking for a job. Through their conversation, it becomes clear that these graduates are very anxious about their future. They no longer care about the nature of the job, but only that it pays more than 1500 Yuan at least. They feel that China has lost all its Communist ideals and principals, those who do not need a job get one and those who desperately need to work are unable to find any. Issues such as an apartment

or even marriage are distant dreams that they do not dare to think about (Chen, 2012). At the end of the documentary *Wan Chao*, still unemployed, must leave his apartment and move to a room with two other people. He nonetheless feels somehow relieved that he no longer needs to worry about the rent (Chen, 2012).

Part 2:

Giorgio Agamben : Potentiality

Agamben's (1942-) notion of potentiality and impotentiality offers a different mode of critical thinking against the dominant neo-liberal discourse on learning, where actualisation is at its heart. Agamben offers a way of thinking in terms of studying and hence goes beyond the view of education as that which will increase one's employability, in other words reducing education to a means to an end outside itself.

Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of potentiality. Firstly, there is the generic potentiality, which refers to, for example, a child has the potential to one day become the Head of State, in other words, what a child could potentially become or do in the future. The second kind of potentiality refers to someone's ability or the knowledge of how to do, such as, for example, the poet's potential to write a poem, which has come to be known as *existing* potentiality oppose to the *generic* potentiality as mentioned above. The difference is that the child will have to go through a change through learning, and thereby suffers an alteration, in order to develop into someone else. In contrast, poets do not need to go through a change as they already have the potential to bring their ability into actuality but can also choose not to do so. He or she has potential, since they can choose not to write a poem and thereby not actualise their abilities. One could therefore argue that in the heart of potentiality lies in the verb "can" (Agamben, 1999; pp. 177-179).

Through the discussion of vision and hearing, Aristotle shows the potential of our senses. When we see, that is the actualisation of our sight, and when we cannot see, it is when our vision is potential. The principle of sight therefore possesses both actuality, light, and potentiality, darkness (Ibid. pp. 180-181). Through his study of sensations, Aristotle identifies an aporia in the way senses function: "*Why is there no sensation of the senses themselves?*" (Agamben, 1999; p. 180). He subsequently comes to the conclusion that sensation in itself is potential, and can therefore only be sensed when it has an external object (P. Nadal). Based on this insight, Agamben argues that potentiality is a mode of existence of privation; "*What is essential is that potentiality is*

not non-Being, simple privation, but rather the existence of non-Being, the presence of an absence... To have a faculty means to have a privation” (Agamben, 1999; p. 179). This non-being is attached to a paradoxical existence where, on the one hand to say that something has potential implies that it has an existing potentiality, but on the other, it does not exist as an actual being or thing. This paradox is important in Agamben’s attempts to develop a different notion of freedom. By focusing on potentiality as a mode that allows not only doing something but also leaves one with the choice of **not** doing, the notion of potentiality then becomes irreducible to actuality (P. Nadal).

Potential for darkness

One of Agamben’s main focuses is on Aristotle’s points on sight, is where he defines the colour of actuality as light, and potentiality as darkness. This highlights Agamben’s point about potentiality: if potentiality of sight was only manifested through actuality of light, then humans would not be able to experience darkness. However, that is not the case, since we can indeed see shadows and experience darkness: *“they have the potential not to see, the possibility of privation... The greatness – and also the abyss of human potentiality is that it is first of all potential not to act, potential for darkness.”* For Agamben then, the experience of darkness becomes the experience of potentiality in-itself (Agamben, 1999; p. 181).

But what does it mean to be in potential? In the words of Agamben (1999; p. 182): *“to be one’s own lack, to be in relation to one’s own incapacity. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality are capable of their own incapacity. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality are capable if their own **impotentiality**, and only in this way do they become potential. They can be because they are in relation to their own non-being”*. Potentiality therefore is no longer viewed as for the sake of actuality, but becomes potentiality for the sake of potentiality itself. Agamben aims to look beyond the binary account of potentiality, defined as what has yet to be actualised. It is a different movement that focuses on potentiality unto itself and its own privation and non-being, instead of from potentiality to actuality. Furthermore, Aristotle expresses the original structure of potentiality as: *“all potentiality is impotentiality”* (Agamben 1999; p. 182). Consequently, potentiality is the welcoming of non-being; hence, what is potential can

both be and not be. Agamben's main focus then becomes the essence of potentiality that is its own privation, its own non-being.

The identification of impotentiality as the essence of potentiality leads Agamben to a radically different understanding of freedom, by asking what distinguished humans from other living beings. The distinction lies in our capability of our own impotentiality: "*The greatness of human potentiality is measured by the abyss of human impotentiality*" (Agamben, 1999; p. 182). To be truly free then is not the ability to do this or that, in other words not our power to actualise, or even the power to simply refuse doing this or that, but rather in our capacity to not-be, to be capable of one's own impotentiality (P. Nadal).

The Commodification of Education

According to Standing, universities are no longer concerned with aspiring and help the students develop nascent capacities. "*The neo-liberal state has been transforming the school system to make them a consistent part of the market society, pushing education in the direction of 'human capital' formation and job preparation*" (Standing, 2014; p. 116). Universities increasingly operate like companies and view the students as consumers, whom they need to put in charge (Standing, 2012; p. 118). Universities and colleges tend to compete on offering the *luxury model*, which means that they try to compete on which can offer the best dorms, sports facilities and the "*appeal of celebrity academics, celebrated for non-teaching achievements*" (Standing, 2012; p. 117). The University of Missouri and the University of Alabama both started offering their students swimming pools and hot tubs and other country club-like amenities. When one university offers such facilities others follow and it becomes a competition parameter used to attract students. Wesleyan University President Michael Roth explains the connection between the student demands for such amenities and the amount of money they spend on school: "*You give momentum to 'The student is the customer' when you charge them so much money,*" (Kingkade, June 25, 2014). These amenities are mostly aimed at attracting out-of-state students who usually pay twice as much in tuition. The use of these services to gain a competitive advantage is part of the development seen through the 1980s and the 199's where the gap between universities and the market became ever more blurred. Most universities act as companies offering their product, academic knowledge, to their customers, indebted students, forgetting

that are colleagues from the same university system serving the same community (Caffentzis in Jacobsen, 2014; p. 130).

The documentary 'Education, Education' can be viewed as a prominent example of commodification of education and the globalisation of the educational system. Since 1997, the higher education system in China has been privatised, leading to student fees and debt for those who cannot enter the public universities, which are reserved for students who do well on the university entrance exam. Many private universities then send their male employees to rural areas in order to convince the remaining youths who wish for a higher education to enter their colleges. As mentioned, the documentary follows one of these college representatives, Wang. During his presentations, Wang tends to use a PowerPoint presentation, where he will show the audience pictures of their many modern facilities. Although these facilities are teaching-related and not country club-like amenities, they were used as commercial attributes for the university regardless of whether or not they were of any use to the individual student's choice of education. In other words, the mere presence of such facilities and classrooms made the university seem more professional and desirable. After the presentation, Wang explained that the pictures he used were not taken from the Hongbo campus but rather pictures he had found on the Internet (Chen, 2012). However, since most of his audience were peasants who might have never seen a computer, he could easily fool them. His technological superiority compared to them gave him an authority, which helps him to personify the educated and smart city man whose words must be based on knowledge and experience.

During his presentations, Wang would ask the audience to agree to the notion that *'university is your best way out, wouldn't you agree with me?'* to which everyone would agree *'In china it is the only way.'* This would make universities the answer to their prayers and the solution to their problems. However, in order to further strengthen his position he would repeat the same old Chinese saying *'learning is the noblest of pursuits'* and continues *'we should come to the conclusion: Studying not only broadens our knowledge but also gives us a good job and a better quality of life.'* (Chen, 2012). Moreover, more he would also show videos of former students who had been very successful obtained highly paid jobs, 3,000 Yuan monthly compared to the minimum wage of 1,200 Yuan in China. In one of the scenes, Wang, lying in his bed at the hotel, watches one of these interviews. Laughingly he explains how the actor is messing his

lines and looking very awkward. However he would never mention examples of their curriculum, study subject or any research opportunities, the main focus was constantly and always on the opportunities for a future jobs that the college could give (Chen, 2012). When back in his room Wang explains: *‘we are a private enterprise and not really a college - strictly speaking it is a company. We attract the students, get their fees and send them on their way. We don’t teach them anything and the college doesn’t care.’* (Chen, 2012).

Stewart Martin (In Jacobsen 2014) argues how there has been a shift in ideology and its function, where it will have certain elements in common with emancipatory education. The student is offered both choice and opportunity to escape poverty. Education thus becomes the promise of entering the famous middle class. It is the seductive promise that everyone can become part of the middle class if only they get an education. Therefore, if someone does not enter a university they have only themselves to blame for their failure and poverty which will both affect them and their community (p. 93).

In the words of Zizek, education becomes the desired object that will lead the subject to a wanted state of fulfilment. The subject, according to Zizek, is an imbalance between the Real and the Symbolic. Furthermore, the subject is also conditioned by a lack that is shown through a drive, which is without a focus or direction. However, once the individual has gone through a symbolisation process, drive will change to desire. Desire, on the other hand, is both focused and has a direction aimed at a given object. Through fantasy, the subject can, via a desired object, imagine him or herself reaching his or her perfect identity and potential. However, the subject is bound to be disappointed since as soon as the object has been obtained the subject will realise the object’s shortcoming and the lack of inherent qualities (Bjerg, 2012; p. 8-10). Once the students have graduated and obtained their desired object, namely college certification, they are faced with either the difficulty of getting a secure and well-paid job which could help repay their student loans, or further study. Many students chose the latter option in order to be better educated, hoping that it will lead to a better job and can be added to their CVs. as they tend to believe that a higher education will help them get meaningful work with a social impact (Minsky April 21, 2016). In line with Zizek’s concepts, Bingham and Biesta argue that, in the learning discourse, the learner is often a figure constructed around a lack, a ‘not yet’. The learner is not yet skilled or

competent and so on. This discourse emphasises education as an economic transaction. The student has a need, and is therefore viewed as a consumer whereas the teacher and the educational institution is seen at the provider who can meet the needs of the student by providing a commodity, namely education (Lewis, 2011, p. 1-2).

In contrast, Jan Masschelein provides a different critical perspective of ‘the learning society’ phenomenon, which draws on both the work of Hannah Arendt and Foucault. Masschelein argues that societies built on the capitalist production and consumption can be viewed as the victory of animal laborans. Learning thus becomes the *‘organizing principal for optimizing labor productivity, and in turn the citizen becomes first and foremost a learner within a flexible knowledge economy that demands constant ‘retraining’ or ‘reskilling’ to fulfil high-tech, informationally rich jobs.’* (Lewis, 2011; p. 2). What is at stake here is the individual’s survival and the threat of exclusion from society. The subject is, however, not viewed as a lack but rather the learner is a ‘capacity for labour’ that must be actualised. In line with Foucault’s thoughts, education is focused on ‘correcting their potentialities’ in order to reach fulfilment. The lifelong learning is a shift where the responsibility of governance is internalised making economical, political and educational issues the individual’s problem. In neo-liberal society, the individual has become an entrepreneur who must organise and actualise his or her potential in order to reach maximum economic output (Lewis, 2011; p. 2).

The commodification of education is not a unique case found only in China; on the contrary, it is a worldwide trend. As earlier mentioned, the British government transferred the responsibility for universities from the Education to the Business Department. The transfer was justified by the then Business Minister, Lord Mandelson, as an attempt for *“universities to focus more on commercialising the fruits of their endeavour ... business has to be central”* (Standing, 2012; p. 117). In 2013, the Danish government reformed the framework of the study completion - a reform known as Fremdriftsreformen. The reform requires the universities to force the students to take 60 ECTS points each year, ensuring a shortening of the study period by 4,3 months by 2020. If, for example, the University of Copenhagen fails to meet these demands, they risk losing 345 million DKK yearly⁶. Further budget cuts have forced the University of

⁶ <http://nyheder.ku.dk/fremdriftsreform/>

Copenhagen to close 13 subjects in the Humanities faculty including Classical Greek, because these subjects cannot prove themselves to be necessary for the business industry, despite its use value for society and the understanding of our language (Blüdnikow, January 30, 2016). The argument and the demand to meet the industries' needs are not put on universities. The Danish government is currently discussing the changes for Gymnasiums. One of their main changes is to unify three different subjects, namely History, Ancient Greek and Religion. The reshaping of general education is set to promote four competences: innovative, digital and global competences and carrier competences. However, the authors of the article note that the changes do not improve the students' general education but are a sign of yet another attempt to prepare the students for the competitive (state) markets. The preparation for students to become taxpayers starts from earlier years of their lives. The problem is that these students will have a narrowed and very specific access to knowledge and education (Wille and Kepler, April 24, 2016).

Thomas Aastrup Rømer explains in a feature article how *“The government has with 20 lines obliterated the values of Gymnasium”* (April 27, 2016). One of the article's main critiques is that the changing role of language subjects and how students must engage with them: Moreover, language subjects lose their cultural anchoring and are made into communication classes. For example, it states that *‘the language subjects must have more emphasis on students' communicative competence rather than, say literature analysis. Therefore, adjusted curricula⁷’*. All these changes are made to prepare the students to meet the needs of the ever-changing labour market and *‘to contribute to solutions to global problems’* (Rømer, April 27, 2016).

Learning society

The lack of focus on the actual education can best be viewed in Wang Pan's case. She spent a great deal of her time considering which college she should choose and what education. This is not, in itself, problematical, the problem, however, is that she had set her mind on entering a college not because a given subject interested her nor that she found studying particularly rewarding in itself, but she wanted an education solely because of the opportunities it would give her for a better and brighter future. As her mother suggested: *“Study medicine and you will always have a job”* (Chen, 2012).

⁷ Translated from Danish to English by Alia Mohammad

Education then becomes a means to an end, and is not pursued as an end in itself. The product bought is a graduation certificate that holds the promise of a better future. When education becomes a commodity that can be bought, which in itself, has no value, it is reduced to a means to an end; therefore, education itself would no longer be an end. Educational institutions' main concern will no longer be to promote students to think independently, explore, and rediscover themes and patterns, etc. Instead, the student will be bound to only study that which allows him/her to perform a specific function at work. It is only a study of subjects with a clear and distinction utility. It will not become a study of one's limits, standing on the threshold or the spot between potentiality and actuality. This commodification of education does not promote education as that which helps one to learn what it means to learn. To rediscover and relearn a known subject's in new ways. In other words, what is a stake is the process of learning itself, or the experience of learning as learning itself.

Giorgio Agamben's theory of potentiality and impotentiality will be used to rethink the neo-liberal education system in order to allow for a new understanding of freedom in within this system (Lewis, 2011; p. 3). As mentioned, Agamben relies on Aristotle's distinction between two kinds of potentiality; *generic* and *existing* potentiality (Agamben, 1999; pp. 177-179).

As shown, Agamben uses Aristotle's insight on the potentiality of our senses to argue that potentiality is a mode of existence of privation. This effects his notion of freedom, where the focus is on potentiality as a mode that allows to the choice of not doing - hence potentiality becomes irreducible to actuality (P. Nadal). However, often the education system is concerned about how to actualise the potential of the students. It is part of the discourse of education that policy makers, principals and others will desire to help students to reach their potential (Lewis, 2014; p. 336). Some even argue in favour of tuition-free universities based on the assumption that it would help the society as a whole to reach its full potential (Minsky, February 11, 2016). The need to help children to achieve this is often the reason many parents start buying DVDs that can teach them how to speak to their children in order to make sure their children will be gifted and talented to ensure their inclusion in society. This is heavily driven by the marketing fear that they will otherwise be left behind by the learning society. These methods used by parents are aimed at controlling the powers of the genius and direct

them towards the competition for future jobs. In the neo-economical society, it is the responsibility of the individual to maximise the genius and let it reach its full potential. It is a genius that needs to be stimulated through various ways from the womb. We must submit the genius to the will of our minds so that it can emerge on command (Lewis, 2014; p. 344). Here the child goes through various process of alternation in order to become someone else (Agamben, 1999; pp. 177-179). This alternation, the becoming other, when acted destroys our very potential. The neo-liberal learning society model reduces potentiality to a matter of actualisation. According to Agamben it is not because the neo-liberal views the child as lack, on the contrary, the child embodies endless potential that can and hence must be actualise (Lewis, 2011; p. 3). Education therefore becomes organised based on a means-to-an-end logic, which sacrifices our impotentiality. In other words, in order to remain a part of the society the individual must sacrifice his or her impotentiality, and only focus on how to actualise their potentiality. The neo-liberal society based on consumption and production uses education as an instrument to optimise labour productivity at the expense of our political life. The victory of *animal labourans* means that the individual is always under the threat of exclusion and heightened risk of unemployment, and must therefore remain in constant state of relearning and reskilling in order to remain flexible and capable of adapting to an ever more unstable economy (Lewis, 2014; p. 337). In other words, potentialities within the learning society are form of ‘governmentality of the self’ where it is connected with ‘withdrawal of the state’ and the move of responsibility to the individual, economic and political and education problems become individual problems. In order to not be excluded from society, individuals have to train to actualise their potentials as students and later workers. The actualisation of the individual is dependent on the needs of the market. ‘*The learner is the student who must sacrifice his or her im-potentiality in order to graduate on time, get a good paying job and become somebody*’ or else face abandonment and exclusion (Lewis, 2014; p. 338).

Wang Pan’s mother does, for a brief moment, show scepticism regarding the amount of graduates saying: ‘*What’s the point of all the students going to university. There will be too many graduates. I suppose graduates do get better jobs*’. Wang Pan explains to the viewer why education is important for her: ‘*...for families like ours, if I quit my studies and work in the city it will be hard for me to give my parents a better life in the future I*

believe with a degree I would have more chances to provide for them... I will go to college for their sake'.

If one looks at education as a commodity then according to market there has to be a balance between demand and supply. The mother's statement therefore shows the underlying neo-economic logic, that if there are too many graduates from the same field there will be a high level of unemployment, given that, of course, education is defined as a process of learning and obtaining skills within a specific subject determined by the needs of the market. Suddenly there will be high levels of supply and low demand, and the desired end - namely a job - would become hard to reach. But Wang Pan herself views education as her only way out of poverty and the possibility of providing for her family. The problem with getting a degree is that quite often the students will finish with a significant amount of debt that they will have to repay. According to Wang (the tutor) it will take a student five years to repay their debts on a minimum monthly wage of 190 dollars, given that they don't spend any of it (Chen, 2012). The difficulty that many graduates face when searching for job and their precarious living situation will be elaborated in the later section. However, it is important to note that many see education as a way out of poverty and as a promise to enter the desirable middle class, but end up taking temporary jobs in order to repay their debts. In many cases around the world and not just China, education fails to deliver on its promises of job security and employability. In other words, education that is sold as an investment good often fails to give an economic return (Standing, 2014; p. 115).

Wang Pan's statement can be seen as a state of necessity that requires a specific decision that cannot be otherwise. However, the state of necessity has an aporia that is often overlooked: *'Far from occurring as an objective given, necessity clearly entails a subjective judgment, and that obviously the only circumstances that are necessary and objective are those that are declared so'* (Agamben in Lewis, 2014; p. 339) by a sovereign. As earlier, Wang would start his presentation with an agreement between himself and the audience that education is the only way out of poverty in China. Education then becomes a necessity, and the only way out; this prevents the populations of rural areas of thinking of other alternatives ways to improve their financial situation. While Wang, the tutor, is well aware of the untruthfulness of the

statement he continues to repeat during his presentation, only to criticise the system as soon as he is in a private setting (Chen, 2012).

Another element used to convince the audience of the truth of the testimony or Wang's saying, is by showing videos of earlier students who have graduated and now have successful and well-paid positions in different companies. The use of these fake interviews with actors, and not actual graduates, shows the underlying neo-liberal logic of means-to-end both in the educational system and the society. Wang is well aware that the audience primarily wish their children to have a prospect of a well-paid and secure job in order to remain an included part of the society. The prospect of a future job is what drives most students to get a higher education around the world, and is not a Chinese phenomenon. In fact, President Obama has been working for a long time to create a scorecard that compares different colleges, and that will provide the students with information about the expected salary and employability of different degrees across the US and how much debt they will expect to have when they graduate. The survey, however, does not mention the quality of the education, unlike the UK's national student survey (Frank, September 24, 2015). The UK government hopes that the survey will help students make better choices when considering different colleges in the kingdom, thinking that it will help them reach their full potential (Minsky, October 20, 2015). British students are also offered a survey that provides them with a list of top universities in the kingdom, as chosen by major employers (Minsky, November 12, 2015).

From Learning to Studying

In the following section, there will be a review of the difference between learning and studying, once again referring to Agamben's notion of potentiality and impotentiality. In the words of Agamben (1999; p. 182) to be in potential means: *"to be one's own lack, to be in relation to one's own incapacity. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality are capable of their own incapacity. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality are capable of their own **impotentiality**, and only in this way do they become potential. They can be because they are in relation to their own non-being"*. This view of potentiality aims to look beyond the binary account of potentiality. As mentioned, it tries to go beyond the movement from potentiality to actualization, and instead focus on potentiality for its own sake and privation. Identifying impotentiality

as the essence of potentiality, which also leads to this different understanding of freedom.

The difference between learning and studying is that the former presupposes a linear progress and the mastery of will, moving and bringing the students closer to definite and preset ends, where they will actualise certain skills only to be able to measure and quantify it. It is about the entrepreneurial will and necessity. The latter, however, is a radically different process that does not have an end, but is to be met by a certain feeling of not knowing what you thought you know, to experience the wavering between impotentiality and potentiality (Lewis, 2014; pp. 340-341). The initiatives and theories that are built around the neo-liberal concepts of entrepreneurial optimism are denying us our freedom of impotentiality and our capability to be otherwise. The relationship between potentiality and impotentiality helps the student to realise the limits of their will and the contingency of their ideas (Lewis, 2014; p. 340) The problem today is that we are used to thinking we are capable of everything, *we can do it*, so we have lost track of the things we cannot do, our incapacities. Neo-liberal education tells us that we should *pull ourselves up by our bootstraps through self-initiated entrepreneurialism* (Lewis, 2014; p. 340). While the learning society requires us to become a self-regulating entrepreneur, studying teaches us to be within our capacity to be or not be (Lewis, 2011; p. 3). Agamben's theory is therefore an attempt to redefine potentiality in the learning society. Potentiality is a means without end, which allows one to belong without a set of presupposed conditions about one's identity, class, intelligence, and so on. *'To experience potentiality is to experience the freedom to resist destruction and on this sense freely master our capacities in the moment of their indeterminate appearance as whatever'* (Lewis, 2011; p. 5). Studying is the resistance of instrumental ends and the ability to dwell in those moments of stupidity of doubting what one knows (Lewis, 2011; p. 8).

As mentioned in the exploration of theory, Aristotle defines the colour of actuality as light and potentiality as darkness. Since we are indeed capable of experiencing darkness, potentiality cannot be reduced to only actuality; hence the experience of darkness becomes the experience of potentiality in-itself (Agamben, 1999; p. 181). To study is thus to remain in the shadows, to not be tempted to follow the colour of light and actualisation. It is to allow ourselves to see the new possibilities that are not

predetermined by neo-liberal logics. The difference between learning and studying must not be viewed as opposed to each other but rather: *'to study is to experience learning without end, without occupation and without destination* (Lewis, 2011; p. 14).

Part 3

The Apparatus

Some of Giorgio Agamben's most important concepts to this thesis will be elaborated and explained in this section. The first term, apparatus, shows the negative aspects of sovereignty where the concepts of profanation and form-of-life offer mechanisms of resistance or possible critique. In other words Agamben's concepts introduce a new way of thinking the relation between subjectivity and power.

Giorgio Agamben proposes that the word *dispositif*, apparatus in English, is an important technical term in Foucault's thought, especially in regards to his work with governmentality. Foucault himself only comes close to offering a definition in an interview in 1977. Accordingly, in order to find a more precise definition, Agamben uses an etymological approach, starting with Foucault's work. During the late 60s, Foucault uses the term *positivity*, an etymological neighbour to *dispositif* (Agamben, 2009: p. 3). He had found this term through the readings of Hyppolite's analysis of Hegel. According to Hyppolite, Hegel distinguishes between two concept of religion, namely "natural religion" and "positive religion" (Agamben, 2009;. p. 4). While the former is about the relationship between human reason and the divine, the later contains concepts and information that exceeds reason and understanding. This results in actions based on orders or from obedience, and not due to any interest, since they do not come naturally to men. Given positivity is the name Hegel gives the *historical element*, which is the set of rules, institutions, and of processes of subjectification through which power relations become reinforced. Foucault's agenda becomes to analyse the manners through which the positivities, apparatuses operate through the mechanisms of power.

Through Agamben's theological genealogy investigation of economy, he notes the Greek term, *oikonomia*, which indicates the administration and the management of the home, *oikos* that has since also served a theological function in the Church's history. The term *oikonomia* describes the management relations between the head of the family, namely the father, and the rest of the household. Due to the threefold divine figure in Christianity, many feared the reintroduction of polytheism in the Christian

faith. The Greek term, *oikonomia* becomes an apparatus *through which the Trinitarian dogma and the idea of a divine providential governance of the world introduced into the Christian faith* (Agamben, 2009; p. 10). Just as the father can decentralise the administration of the household by entrusting his son with some duties and still keep his power, God, the father, entrusts Christ, the son, the governance of human history (Agamben, 2009; p. 10). God therefore, in his being, is considered one and is the governing body, but in his administration of his world, that is his *oikonomia*, is triple, by scattering power to Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The Greek term *oikonomia* is translated to *Dispositio* in Latin, and *dispositif* in French. The above-mentioned theological legacy of the Greek term becomes embedded in the *dispositif* of which Foucault speaks. Just as the divine figure, God, is divided and articulated in both being, and praxis, the apparatus points at pure governance freed from question of being. Because of this, the process of subjectification becomes essential for the function and operations of the apparatus; *This is the reason why apparatus must always imply a process of subjectification, that is to say, they must produce their subject* (Agamben, 2009; p. 11). The apparatus is all these practices, institutions and so on that affect human behaviours and thoughts by purporting its own usefulness (Agamben, 2009; p. 12).

Agamben further develops the term of apparatus by dividing beings into larger classes. On the one hand the living being, or the ontology of creatures and on the other the apparatus, which tries to recapture the living beings and govern them. In the words of Agamben: *“Further expanding the already large class of Foucauldian apparatuses, I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has, in some way, the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings”* (Agamben, 2009; p. 14). Literature, philosophy, technology and even language are apparatus that captures the living being. In the tension between the living being and the apparatus, the subject is created as the third class. Apparatus create the *human* out of the *Homo sapiens* through a division which resembles the division in the divine figure between being and action. This results in a separation between the living being from him/herself and his/her environment. Due to these apparatus, humanity has alienated itself from its own animalistic nature, and seeks to fill the void through objects, instruments and different technologies. The separation between the living being and its environment also creates

the possibility of being in the apparatus' world, where the process of subjectification begins. The desire for happiness is at the heart of each apparatus, which drives the subject towards the process of subjectification (Agamben, 2009; p. 17).

In the very centre of apparatus is the process of subjectification, without which it cannot govern but can only exercise violence. The natural being undergoes these processes of subjectification without realising the changes. The apparatus' true power lies in its ability to present itself to the subject, through various possibilities and technologies, from which the subject can freely choose. "*Foucault has demonstrated how, in a disciplinary society, apparatuses aim to create - through a series of practices, discourses, and bodies of knowledge - docile, yet free bodies that assume their identity and their "freedom" as subjects in the very process of their de-subjectification*" (Agamben, 2009; p. 19).

It is important to notice the apparatus' ability to appear to the subject, as a way of liberation and freedom to choose whom one wants to be. However, the apparatus creates an environment where the subject's thoughts, political views and behaviours are limited and steered towards a specific direction. Noticeably, in the very heart of every subjectification, lies de-subjectification since, according to Agamben, subjectification happens in the meeting between the individual and the speech. The subject is where speech is actualised and, more importantly, not actualised. Man is the animal that splits the language by seeing it as an object, and can only speak if he/she constitutes him/herself as its subject by pronouncing an 'I'. In that moment however the subject implicitly goes through a de-subjectification since when saying 'I' he/she loses him/herself as a real individual in order to identify with and become the subject of this 'I' that lacks all content and substantiality but works only as a reference to this *discursive event* (Pedersen, 2005; pp. 66-67). When he/she pronounces the 'I' he/she is introduced to a language which becomes impossible to transcend. However children who are yet (de)-subjectified, *infants*, have access to the potentiality of language and can form a true community made of anonymous and open beings.

What is at the heart of Agamben's notions and political philosophy is his rejection of the dualities that make up western politics such as naked life/political life exclusion/inclusion. The aim of biopolitics is to create a complete distinction between humanity's natural life and political lives, where Agamben wants to remain in that exact spot where there is a double movement between subjectification and de-

subjectification, identity and non-identity, because only here resistance to bio-power can be found (Pedersen, 2005; pp 68-69).

The sanctification of apparatus:

“All of this means that the strategy that we must adopt in our hand-to-hand combat with apparatuses cannot be a simple one. This is because what we are dealing with here is the liberation of that which remains captured and separated by means of apparatuses, in order to bring it back to a possible common use” (Agamben, 2009; p. 17).

In order to become somewhat freed from apparatuses' hold on the individual, what has been separated and has been made sacred must be regained, and brought back to the sphere of common use. By looking closer at the sphere of religion, Agamben describes how it sanctifies certain places, objects and even humans as seen through the figure of Homo Sacer in Roman societies. Religion does not come as commonly mistaken, from the term *religare*, defined as that which binds and unites the divine and the human, but on the contrary, comes from *relegere*, emphasising the separation between humans and the divine, the profane and the sacred (Agamben, 2007; p. 74-75). In other words, religion can be defined as that which removes, places, objects, animals and humans from the common use of man to a separate sphere for the use of gods. This separation is made possible through the apparatus of sacrifice, which allows the passage of the profane to the sacred. *Capitalism and other modern forms of power seem to generalize and push to the extreme the processes of separation that define religion* (Agamben, 2009; p 19). For instance, in our modern society, work and career have become holy, and can only be reached through the personal sacrifice of one's time and personal life. Self-realisation for today's knowledge workers does not come through an inner freedom, but rather through activity and production. One's worth in the society depends on one's ability to generate monetary value (Carnera; Draft; p. 10).

The Profanation of apparatus

What once became sacred through scarification can be restored to common use through profanation, where it functions as a *counter-apparatus* (Agamben, 2009; p. 19). In the realm of religion. the simplest form of profanation is physical contact, one only needs to touch the sacred object, in order to return it to common use; *“To profane means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation or,*

rather, puts it to a particular use” (Agamben, 2007; p. 74). To profane then means to neutralise or deactivate the apparatuses of power. Profanation therefore opens the opportunity to freely and creatively use an object. It allows the subject to experiment with an object and use it in new and different modes. The new use of the object does not take place by abolishing the earlier states, but by deactivating the use of it. When presented with an object, the subject is therefore driven by a sense of experimentation and curiosity, where the free use and the potential of the object are investigated. In this kind of meeting between the subject and the object, the process of profanation begins, and it is not a quality embedded in a certain objects. Pure use becomes a central element in profanation, and refers to the use of an object without reducing it to specific use, function and purpose. For instance, children create toys out of things that belong to different spheres, they add to the thing a new dimension of use, without abolishing the old one, which demonstrates the pure use of things (Agamben, 2007; p. 76). True play is associated with, and has a negative, capacity - namely potentiality. As mentioned, a child can find new ways to use an object and has the capacity to say no. A toy car does not need to be used in only one way but can be used in many alternative ones. Play then is a negative potentiality, which allows things to remain open, hence it does not have, nor moves toward, and predefined end.

Although profanation offers the subject modes through which it can achieve greater freedom, capitalism has managed to remove from common use many activities and things *that serve profanation* (Carnera, Draft; p. 8). Modern work life and its discourses promote consumption, and leave little to free use. In today’s organisations, even play has become a managerial tool, and means to an end, which stands in opposition to the function of play. True play has the ability to interrupt capitalism’s constant need for consumption and moving objects to free use. Play and profanation can hence be viewed as an ethical political investigation or an attempt to investigate fundamental values without leading to an end. It is an investigative practice – a potentiality.

Form-of-life

Agamben's concept of potentiality is closely connected to the notion of form-of-life or, as he sometimes also refers to it, "happy life" (C. Mills). Form-of-life is Agamben's attempt to create counterparts or a different paradigm to biopolitics, which is founded on the distinction made in Ancient Greece between natural life (zoe) and a political one (bios). Agamben argues that today's politics are based on biopolitics, where they try to manage aspects of people's naked or biological life such as their health, sexuality and even birth and death. *"According to Agamben, the basic mechanism of biopolitics is exclusion, separation, and exception, that makes it possible to exclude persons from the field of politics and law and thereby reduce each from a citizen imputed with political rights to that of naked life"* (Carnera, Draft; p. 2). The naked or bar life can be seen as different figures under different conditions, the figure of the refugee is one of the most famous examples of 'naked life' where it is separated from its form and reduced to nothing but its biological life and is only entitled to one identity - namely the refugee. To be reduced to and given only one identity becomes problematic because it doesn't allow the subject to link to a form where it can ask who am I, where it can hesitate, wonder and question its being, the subject then can only use its basic existence and it is governed on its life (zoe). In this case, the 'naked life' is manifested through the figure of the precarious worker who has lost all its labour rights and benefits, is excluded from the labour market and the society and is reduced to a naked life (Carnera, Draft; p. 2-3).

In 'Means without End' he describes Form-of-life as a politics of pure means, where human life (zoe) cannot be separated from its form (bios), thereby not allowing the reduction to a bar or naked life. This formulation defines a human life that is not driven by a necessity or biological vocation but instead, it is open to possibilities regardless of how customary it may seem, *"it defines a life – human life – in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply facts but always and above all possibilities of life, always and above all power"* (Agamben, 2000; p. 4). The openness to possibilities of this notion of politics is closely related to his notion of potentiality. What is at stake here is living itself, a way of being freed to explore one's own negativity and limits and not reduced to the freedom to choose or not choose this or that. It is politics or a notion of happiness and values that requires a new critical ethos (Carnera, Draft; p. 3). Politics is first and foremost the potentiality and possibility of

happiness, which can be achieved by ending the dual problem of history and the state at the same time (C. Mills). Agamben's politics view man as pure possibility, neither assigned an already chosen and presupposed historical destiny nor as a biological creature (Carnera, Draft; p. 4). *A political life, that is, a life directed toward the idea of happiness and cohesive with a form-of-life, is thinkable only starting from the emancipation from such a division, with the irrevocable exodus from any sovereignty. The question about the possibility of a nonstatist politics necessarily takes this form: Is today something like a form-of-life, a life for which living itself would be at stake in its own living, possible? Is today a life of power available?* (Agamben, 2000; pp. 8-9).

In *The Coming Community*, he rethinks the problems of community and develops a concept of it that does not require a common identity in order to belong and partake. It is a community consisting of 'whatever singularities' that are bound by co-belonging rather than *affirmation of identity or 'representable condition of belonging'* (C. Mills). It is, however, a community that is yet to be seen. Nonetheless, I will argue that the precariat has precisely the potential of becoming such a community not based on common predefined identity and which has *entirely exhausted their power* (Agamben 2000; p. 10), but rather a community of 'whatever singularities' which is composed by life of power.

Derrida's Critique of Western Metaphysics

This thesis' topic requires a theory that goes beyond dichotomies or binary logic, which is exactly what Derrida's concept of deconstruction and the term *pharmakon* offer. The concept of deconstruction allows for an analysis, which draws attention to the underlying binary oppositions in order to subvert it. There is a complexity and embedded ambivalence in the Precariat that goes beyond binary oppositions and is therefore irreducible to a normative hierarchy

Jacques Derrida has become best known for his concept of deconstruction through which he elaborated a critique of western metaphysics that concern both the philosophic tradition and everyday thought and language. The problem is that western thought has always been structured around binary logical opposition or dichotomies, among others: good vs. evil, presence vs. absence, and identity vs. difference. These

binary logical oppositions are not, however, considered equal entities, and are therefore arranged in a normative or violent hierarchy. These hierarchal oppositions favour good, presence and identity over evil, absence and difference, in other words the second pair is viewed negatively. When concerned with the question of Being, western philosophy has determined Being as presence (Derrida, 1981; p. viii). Consequently, western metaphysics favours the spoken word over that of writing - hence the former presupposes the presence of both the speaker and the listener. The speaker hears his own speech simultaneously with the listener and therefore the temporal and spatial distance between them is eliminated: "*This immediacy seems to guarantee the notion that in the spoken word we know what we mean, mean what we say, say what we mean, and know what we have said.*"(Derrida, 1981; p. ix). Writing thus becomes a mere substitute for the spoken word whenever speech is not possible. Through writing, the writer distances him or herself from their thought, which is then transformed into something that can be read even after the writer's death, which leads to the corruption of the self-presence (Derrida, 1981; p. ix). This point should not be mistaken as an act of favouring writing over speech, but to show that the possibility of differentiating between the two based on the presence vs. absence is illusory, since both are equally structured by difference and distance (Derrida, 1981; p. xi).

The term 'de-construction' is related to 'analysis', which etymologically means 'to undo' (Derrida, 1981; p. xv). The deconstruction of a text does not seek to find its flaws and deficiencies or prove that meaning is impossible. Instead, it should rather be viewed as an analytical tool, which opens the text and shows what crucial distinction the text is trying to deal with. What the deconstructive reading could destroy is *the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another*" (Derrida, 1981; p. xv). The deconstructive readings errand is to clarify that which an author sees is thoroughly linked to what he *does not see* (Derrida, 1981; p. xv).

Plato's Pharmacy

Derrida primarily focuses on '*Phaedrus*', which is a Platonic dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus about the value of writing. While going walking on the outskirts of Athena, Socrates listens to Phaedrus read a text of a speech by the sophist Lysias, which is about the matters of love. Lysias has, through the text, demonstrated that a loveless relationship is favoured over one of love (Derrida, 1981; p. xxv). Challenged

by Phaedrus, Socrates gives his account of love only to realise that he had been tricked into giving a false account. Blaming the written word as the cause of his false account of love, he then argues that love is a divine force (Johnsen, 2014; p. 5). According to Derrida, the text that Phaedrus reads to Socrates is a *pharmakon*, translated from ancient Greek as poison that can cause someone to stray from his or her *natural, habitual paths and laws* (Derrida, 1981; pp. 75-77). Despite his accusation of writing as the reason for his false account, Socrates remains neutral towards writing and argues; “*Writing is not in itself a shameful, indecent, infamous (aiskhron) activity. One is dishonoured only if one writes in a dishonourable manner*” (Derrida, 1981; pp. 73-74) consequently differentiating between good and bad writing becomes a question of morality. This distinction between good and bad writing takes place through the binary logical opposition: “*While good writing reports the true essence of things, bad writing seduces the reader by presenting a false appearance of things*” (Johnsen, 2014; p. 6).

Socrates retells the myth of Theuth, one of the old gods in Egypt, who invented geometry, calculation, astronomy and, above all, writing. Theuth presents the king of all Egypt, Thamus, with these inventions that ought to be shared with other Egyptians. Thamus questioned Theuth about the usefulness of each one and when he reached writing Theuth said: “*This discipline my King, will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories: my invention is a recipe (pharmakon) for both memory and wisdom*” (Derrida, 1981; p. 81). The king, however, says to Theuth that this invention will introduce forgetfulness into the soul, because people will no longer use their natural memory and instead rely on the written text. The term *pharmakon* can lead to confusion of how to understand this passage, since *pharmakon* can both be a remedy and poison. Depending on how *pharmakon* is translated, writing could either improve memory or the effectiveness of the remedy could be reversed (Derrida, 1981; p. 99-100).

The translation of *pharmakon* by either remedy or poison cannot be either accepted or rejected, but the ambivalence, and its power to fascinate and ability to simultaneously be beneficent and maleficent, would be lost and reduced to a binary opposition (Derrida, 1981; pp. 75, 101). *Pharmakon*, however, cannot provide writing with an essence of either good or evil, because writing can improve our access to more accurate knowledge but, at the same time, we could become too dependent on text and would lose our natural ability of remembering. Consequentially, Plato fails to

distinguish between good and bad writing, hence it is unclear whether it is poison or remedy (Johnsen, 2014; p. 7).

The apparatus of labour market

According to Agamben, apparatus always implies a process of subjectification, where they must produce their subjects (Agamben, 2009; p. 12). It is therefore important to look closer at and analyse the technologies, rationales and the production of subjectivity in the dispositive of working life. As mentioned, Agamben defines apparatus as: *“literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living being... but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and - why not - language itself...”* (Agamben, 2009; p. 14).

Throughout the documentary Wang can be seen in two different modes or identity, one as Wang the tutor and the other as Wang the human, as he himself describes (Chen 2012). The tutor is typically seen as the figure in a white shirt and a tie where he explains to the villagers around the country how education is the best way for their children to escape poverty. Using different pictures and videos of both teachers and former students, he can validate his statements. These technological devices help Wang to seem more knowledgeable and authoritative, which help to legitimise his points about how education is the best way out of poverty. According to Wang, most of these villagers have never seen a computer before, and here in front of them stands a man who has clearly mastered these new technologies and seems to be articulate, proving how his education has clearly improved his living condition. The room's setting and devices, and his clothing help portray the tutor as an expert figure.

Wang, the human, reveals the truth to the viewer while half laying in his bed wearing nothing but his boxer shorts about how these videos and images are taken of actors and are therefore fake, and do not in any way reflect the truth about Hongbo College. (Chen 2012). By the end of the documentary Wang (the tutor) and Wang Pan (the student) paths cross and they have a conversation. In the next scene, Wang is at his hotel room trying to pack his bag in order to leave, heavily affected by his meeting with Wang Pan. He attempts to take off his tie with the words ‘let me transform back

into a human' (Chun, 2012). Only afterwards, he explains how entering college would be a terrible idea for Wang Pan and her family given their economic situation. The tie becomes the apparatus through which the behaviours, the gestures and the opinions of Wang are modelled and determined (Agamben, 2009; p. 14). The tie produces the subjectivity of Wang, the tutor who works for the Hongbo College and who does everything in his power to convince as many prospective students as possible to enrol in his college. He even uses a more authoritative voice to seem trustworthy, as he points out, and spends time to encourage individuals to enter their college. Wang does not attempt to criticise his workplace while wearing the tie and is thereby identified as the tutor. The power apparatus has fully taken over his freedom and autonomy, and he submits himself to its structures and technologies. The connection between apparatus, subjectification and de-subjectification becomes visible in this scene. As the apparatus produces its subject, in this case Wang the tutor is undergoing a de-subjectification process where, in a sense, his very humanity is at stake. The labour market dispositive requires him to promote the parts of his subjectivity that are beneficial for his employer - in this case his ability to give a convincing speech on the importance of education in order to escape poverty. All the while, he must suppress aspects of himself that are not important or maybe in this case even directly detrimental to his workplace, such as his conscience and morality. What is important is not his morals or political capabilities, but his ability to generate surplus.

Wang works for Hongbo College, which is part of the education sector. As mentioned, the learning society is built around the rationale that the educational sector must make themselves relevant to the labour market, and therefore educational institutions must meet the needs of the labour market by offering programmes that are useful to the market. In other words, educational institutions must help shape and produce the necessary employees to meet the current and the future need of the market. Education thus becomes targeted towards an '*external*' that is *economically based and labour market-oriented* (Carnera, 2016; p. 2). Education no longer has an intrinsic value but must be evaluated on its usefulness to the labour market and the neoliberal economy, or at least it must send the right signals to the outside world about its programmes; the quality and the value of the contents is no longer a matter of interest. This shows how education functions as a market dispositive and not a value dispositive, because its aim is to produce employees for the labour market and not to produce autonomous subjects

who exercise or practise their curiosity about knowledge and the world in which we live (Carnera, 2016; p. 2). Education has thus become a means to an end, namely the promise of employability and thereby the escape from poverty. It is due to this promise that Wang Pan chooses to enter a college and attempts to finish higher education (Chen, 2012).

Wan Chao, the recent graduate from Luojia College, is in a hurry to find a job, and can be seen reading his mission statement aloud while sitting at his desk. In the statement, he speaks of how, over the past four years, he has learnt how to realise his dreams and become independent and can face society and make the best decisions. He has majored in international finance and trade, and has studied accountancy in his spare time, and, with these qualifications and *“previous work experience I believe I can face any challenge at the workplace. I will contribute my humble effort for society and socialism and for a better future”* (Chen 2012). There can be a comparison drawn between Wan Chao’s mission statement on the one hand and Thomas Juhl’s case on the other (June 15, 2015). Both view work as the way to prove one’s worth to society, implicitly indicating how individuals are measured in economic binary codes: profit/ loss. Their usefulness is based on productivity: *produce or disappear*. Through the neoliberal biopolitical discourse, it has become the individual moralistic responsibility to supply a profit through production and constant activity (Carnera Draft; p. 10). Now that they have graduated, both Wan Chao in China and Juhl in Denmark must get a well-paying job and become somebody, or else they will face exclusion (Lewis, 2014; p. 338). It is through the apparatus of the labour market and neoliberal economy that work has become where the individual’s self-realisation takes place. The apparatus appears to the individual as a way of liberation and the freedom to be whom one wants to be (Pedersen, 2005; p. 66). As Wan Chao states, the four years of learning have now taught him how to realise his dreams and reach his full potential. This potentiality is what capitalists purchase, something that has yet to be actualised, potential is non-present and non-real and yet it is subject to the laws of supply and demand. The buyer of labour power consumes this potential by setting the seller to work. This non-present has become a very important commodity in capitalism. Given that the workers’ use value does not exist in isolation from them but only in their potentiality as possibility, it cannot therefore be separated from the living person. Hence according to Virno biopolitics, through different strategies becomes the governance of the living body

because of the nature of potentiality, which is inseparable from the body and is sold and bought as a commodity (Virno, 2004; p. 82-83). Today's workers must be able to adapt to changing circumstances and be accustomed to mobility and flexibility in moving from one set of rules to another. The worker becomes a master of flexibility not inside but outside the workplace during pre-work (Virno, 2004; 84-85). It is exactly due to his education and part-time work experience, pre-work, that Wan Chao can state he can face any challenge at his future workplace - by actualising his capacities in order to solve whatever task he faces.

The labour market dispositive in the performance society presents itself to the subject as endless freedom to self-realisation and actualisation of his potentiality. However, this freedom seems more as an obligation to act. In one respect, the endless options and choices must be viewed as something positive, but at the same time, the subject is anxious to not make the wrong choice and thereby misuse that freedom. "*However, we may adduce that this is a subject of shame. At stake are the identity and the being of the subject, not in relation to specific sets of norms but in relation to principle of creation: Perform, select, be free.*" (Larsen, Draft; p. 12). The free subject of modernity's shame is regarded with the subject's meeting with the *detached self-projecting, judgemental gaze* (Larsen, Draft; p. 13). It is very important for Wan Chao to explain how, through the last four years, he has become capable of making the best decisions. He is aware of his opportunities as a student, but at the same time, he is also aware of the responsibilities that come with it. Therefore, he emphasises that his four years were well spent and contained useful activities and were competence developing.

Gorm Larsen explains how the modern subject adjusts to the norm of society through humanistic upbringing in the home, the school, and later the workplace: "*In short, now that the responsibility of mental self-discipline lies with the subject, the authorities no longer oppress the subject. Instead, the mechanisms of discipline produce oppressing subjectivities*" (Draft; p. 5). The disciplined subject has, through surveillance, manipulation and structures of punishment formed as a responsible and guilt-oriented individual. The performance society is, however, centred around positivity, project and initiative, instead of prohibition and command and the negativity characteristic of the disciplinary society (Larsen, Draft; pp. 5-8). Even though his major was International Finance and Trade, he has still taken the initiative to study accounting in his spare time and has taken part-time jobs. These are a reflection of Wan Chao proving that he has

learnt how to make the best decisions and has implemented this knowledge through his college time by making the right decisions. He understands the responsibility and the obligations that come with his freedom to choose. The apparatus of the labour market appears to him as a freedom to choose any activities and projects he wants in order to construct his subjectivity and identity, but at the same time implicitly indicating that these options should help to further increase his employability. Therefore, the responsibility of making the right choice lies with him alone. The performance society has no time to pause or to be inactive, but it is concerned with an activity without being. This is shown in the documentary through two scenes connected by a voiceover. At first, we meet Wan Chao happily celebrating his graduation with friends and family while his voiceover is reading parts of the mission statement. In the next scene, he is seated at his desk, and this is where the rest of the mission statement can be heard, and finally the voice and the image match (Chen, 2012). It is almost as if the echo of the future goes through the presence, indicating that he must remain active, and remember why he has spent the last four years at a college, namely so that he can enter the labour market as quickly as possible, and thereby prove himself useful to the society, or more specifically the labour market. Freedom in modern society has become the individual's obligation to prove his or her usefulness (Carnera, 2014). In an article in Information (May 22, 2015) Helle Sodahl Lund, the director of the Center for Balance between Work and Family Life, states: "*We have an agenda that defines people, primarily as labour force. If we do not contribute full-time all the time, we are poor workers. More and more crashes with stress... there is something completely wrong*⁸." The main problem on which the article focuses is that many parents wish to work less in order to spend more time with their families; however, their needs or wishes are not met because the economy and thereby society as a whole would suffer if parents took part-time jobs or even work six hours less each week. This shows that what is best for the economy is what is best for the society, hence when the choice is between helping families to cope and have time to take care of their children before they break down from stress, or the choice to ensure the productivity of Homo labourans, the latter wins.

The subject's self is also at stake and must become a reflexive project where it is explored and constructed. Such has the modern artist become the ideal of our time due to its ability to constantly innovate and be creative. Consequently, the opportunity to

⁸ Translated from Danish to English by Alia Mohammad

shape one's life leads to a responsibility for one's own happiness, success and failure, which leaves the modern identity prone to anxiety. The modern subject has been left to him/herself and is no longer guided by the norms and the protection of the family, social class and God. The modernity is an anxiety provoking time where business seems to represent a way of escape. When life has become a series of choices that must be made, the labour market might help to give an indication of what the right choices might be (Larsen, pp. 9-11). Freedom in the neoliberal society functions as a management technology that helps to regulate the individual's choices. However, freedom is complex and difficult, therefore frightening, because it is a form of formation that aspires to personal progress and power, which tends to be useless to the neoliberal economy (Carnera, 2014). The issue today is according to Carnera (2014) that: "*We have made the moral freedom to a purely personal task. But the personal is already political and social. Self-development is according to Mill, not a self-centred project, but a term for our commitment to the social, moral, political and artistic issues. Such engagements are meaningful in themselves and need no further economic justification. But today all our activities are driven by economic reasons*⁹". However, it seems that through the modern work-life we desire our own oppression in order to be freed from the true freedom that tends to be frightening and anxiety provoking (Carnera, 2014).

Holy Work

In neoliberal society, production and growth have become the moralistic foundation of existence, thus making self-realisation a matter of constant productivity and positivity. Individuals contribute to society by taking part in the labour market and fulfilling their work-obligations, thus showing that the only value relevant to the society is an economic value, highlighting the sacredness of work, which creates its own rules. "*The aura of this sacralisation has many names: Self-realisation, creativity, personal motivation, innovation, positive psychology or positive thinking*" (Carnera, 2016: p. 11). Much of what knowledge workers possess today is about creating seductive narratives to sell themselves, and explaining about their latest achievements, competences and experiences in order to increase their employability and prove themselves valuable. This is what Wan Chao attempted to do through his mission statement: prove how his past four years have been fruitful and valuable to the society.

⁹ Translated from Danish to English by Alia Mohammad

Agamben compares the functions of capitalism with that of religion and, just as religion separates the sphere of the divine from the human, capitalism has separated work from employees. The apparatus of sacrifice allows the passage from the profane to the sacred (Agamben, 2009; p. 19). In order to pass to the sphere of the sacred and access the labour market, individuals must make sacrifices. These sacrifices begin from an early age, in schools where students must study hard and choose the right education and thereby develop the necessary competences. The employees, as subjects, must sacrifice their time, personal life, hobbies and even their im-potentiality and anything that is not useful to increase their employability, their use-value. Wan Chao, like most other students, has both finished college, taken part-time jobs and, additionally, has studied accounting in his spare time. He has engaged in all the activities that should have improved his employability, but as he realises at the job fair that his qualifications are not quite sufficient: *“I want to work, why won’t they hire me? I didn’t graduate from the best universities. Is that the reason why they don’t take me?”* (Chen, 2012). He is left to believe that his decision to enter Luojia College is why he is not able to enter the work force, and due to that mistake, he is excluded from the labour market, and the prospect of having a career.

Wan Chao’s first job interview takes place at a large meeting room, where he is surrounded by desks on both of his sides and in front of him. Across from him are both a female and a male interviewer. The distance between Wan Chao and the interviewer is created by two large desks that are positioned about a metre from each other. When asked about how tough he is he answers: *“I am tough. When I was in accounting, I did many hours of overtime. It’s normal”* (Chen, 2012). By emphasising this experience, he wishes to prove his use value to the workplace, indicating that he is willing to sacrifice time that he could have spent with family, friends or simply relaxing. Work is more important to him than other aspects of his life. He is willing to invest his whole being into his career, making everything but his job of secondary importance. The labour market apparatus produces a subject that deems his/her own employability as of highest value and therefore the subject’s intentions and activities must be concerned with how to improve it. However, again he is told that trading and marketing is not what they do, but Wan Chao answers, *“I can do anything”* (Chen, 2012). *“It is on this other, more obscure, face of potentiality that today the power one ironically defines as “democratic” prefers to act. It separates humans not only and not so much from what*

they can do but primarily and for the most part from what they can not do. Separated from his im-potentiality, deprived of the experience of what he can not do, today's man believes himself capable of everything, and so he repeats his jovial "no problem," and his irresponsible "I can do I," precisely when he should instead realise that he has been consigned in unheard of measure to forces and processes over which he has lost all control. He has become blind not to his capacities but to his incapacities, not to what he can do but to what he cannot, or can not, do". (Agamben in Carnera, 2016; p. 9).

It is precisely his impotentiality that he is willing to sacrifice in order to enter and partake in the labour market. We are to believe that we can do everything - hence we must do everything. The child embodies endless potential that can and hence must be actualised (Lewis, 2011; p. 3) Therefore, the subject must actualise its potentiality through a constant reskilling and retraining and developing his/her competencies in order to meet the needs of the labour market (Lewis, 2011; p. 2). His/her negative capacity would otherwise allow him/her to hesitate, to dwell and wonder, to rediscover a new demission of use, but all these activities are not means to a predefined economical end, and must therefore be abandoned in favour of constant positivity and the great desirable quality of labour market apparatus, namely productivity (Carnera I; p. 9-10).

According to Svend Brinkmann (2014), in this accelerating culture it is important to develop the ability to say no, because a no is a sign of integrity, which shows that a person has certain standards and moral considerations, which prevents him or her from accepting everything that is demanded of them. Integrity is composed of knowledge of moral values and an understanding of duty, which leads the individual to make a reasonable decision based on right and wrong (Brinkmann, 2014: pp. 56-57). Often the 'yes-hat' indicates a positive individual who is interested in progressing. However, we tend to say yes to too many things in our accelerating culture. The problem is not that one is wearing a 'yes-hat' and is remaining positive, only that it has become what is expected of us. If we live a life of only yes, we are highly likely to become stressed and depressed. Brinkmann's point is to keep all your hats available in order to make informed decisions. The demand to always say yes is problematic because it reduces humans to servants that can be required to do anything. The reason why saying yes to everything has become a requirement, is because we live in a project society, and must

utilise our capacities. Subsequently, we can state on our job application how we accept and thrive when challenged. To say no shows inflexibility and a lack of courage (Brinkmann, 2014; pp. 57-61). As Brinkmann shows, saying no can be a very bad sign to send to your employers or even to possible employers. We must, through different methods, show our activity and participation in different projects. LinkedIn is one of the mediums employees use to communicate their competences, and the many projects they have finished seem as a good investment for potential employers.

One of the reasons why both Wang and Wan Chao cannot say no is the fear of unemployment. *'Unemployment and precarity are two sides of the same coin: the social exclusion generated by unemployment forces us to accept (and even be grateful for) jobs that do not allow for a decent life'* (Crisis Mirror: 2016; p. 15). Wang constantly feels guilty because of his job, and yet continues to do it. In fact, he is the longest survivor in this position. One could therefore think that the fear of losing his job and entering an unemployment existence is enough to keep him working. As for Wan Chao, his financial situation is extremely critical, which is an important factor in why he must accept any job offer given to him, even if he must accept many unpaid hours at the office. The fear of unemployment therefore becomes a management technology that ensures the employees' silence and desperation to keep their jobs. However, unemployment also means an exclusion from society, because they can no longer contribute to it. Although this contribution has only an economic value, as mentioned before, it has become the only value of importance. Unemployed individuals also tend to feel characterless due to lack of work identity, which tends to be emotionally stressful in the long term (Juhl, June 15, 2015).

Consequently, if they do have a job they must constantly re-conquer it by making sure that they remain of value in their workplace (Crisis Mirror, 2016: p. 33).

According to Virno, what we have today is an overlapping between fear and anguish because we no longer have the ability to distinguish between a stable inside and an uncertain outside. We have become too used to an ever-changing world without being too fixated on traditions and customs, we have been exposed to the unexpected. In instances of losing one's job, one faces both a well-known danger and a faceless anguish; *fear is always anguish-ridden, circumscribed danger always makes us face the general risk of being in this world.* What happens when we are dismissed is, in many ways, similar to the formerly known feelings of terror one felt being outside the

walls of community. What Virno suggests then, is a new term that is composed of both fear and anguish, namely *uncanny*. What is shared and common for us is that “not feeling at home” feeling, due to exposure to the world because the line between inside and outside is no longer clear (Virno, 2004; p. 33).

Precarity as Poison

By the middle of the documentary Wan Chao finally gets a job; however, this is temporary, because he must first prove his worth to the workplace before they would hire him on a more permanent contract. During his time at the office it becomes clear that he does not have the technical abilities required, more precisely he does not know how to operate and use Excel. This leads to a telephone conversation between Wan Chao and his manager who tells him that his sheets were full of mistakes. As the conversation continues, the viewer can only hear Wan Chao’s responses. By the end of the conversation Wan Chao is nearly as red as the colour of the phone he is holding to his ear and, after a long pause and without another word, Wan Chao hangs up the phone, and immediately looks down at his notes. The cameraman asks Wan Chao what happened, and without looking up, he answers: “*nothing*”. The viewer sees Wan Chao from behind sitting at his work desk - the only one left in the office (Chen, 2012).

One of the most emotionally strong scenes in the documentary follows the one mentioned above, where Wan Chao is seen holding a cigarette and crying violently at the bottom of the stairs. An unknown man is kneeling before him and slapping him as if trying to shake him out of his state of mind. As a third male intervenes, Wan Chao finally answers why he is crying: “*I am upset, I don’t know what’s going on. I feel so miserable.*” (Chen, 2012). Everyone around him tries to comfort him but to no avail. From the lights and the loud music it becomes clear that he is at some sort of nightclub and possibly even under the influence of alcohol. He is left there at the bottom of the stairs alone. In a voiceover Wan Chao explains that the manager no longer thinks he can do the job. Doing overtime has not been enough to solve his task, and prove his use value to the firm.

This scene shows Wan Chao at his most vulnerable, breaking down, and not accepting even the slightest offer of comfort. His immediate thoughts and concerns regard how to pay for his rent, and the realisation that he is still at the bottom of the ladder and must start from the scratch, trying to work his way up. Despite all his efforts, Wan Chao is

no closer to starting a career and landing a secure job that can help him pay the rent and live comfortably. His current life appears fragile, difficult and insecure. He has no prospect of finding a job and is vulnerable to poverty (Standing, 2014; pp. 112-113). The precarious existence here can be described as poison, because it shows how exposed and unsecure Wan Chao's situation is. He is excluded from the society and must spend much of his time looking for job in order to *survive the city* (Chen, 2012). At the end of the documentary, Wan Chao moves out of his room to a dormitory that he will share with two others. Like the other so called 'ants' of the city, Wan Chao will probably spend much of his time continuing to look for a career-promoting job, that matches his degree. However, in order to survive, many 'ants' have to take temporary jobs that differ from week to week and are far beneath their qualifications (TutorMing China Expats & Culture Blog).

The working conditions of many in the labour market are changing and are no longer based on a long-term contract with security, pension and other benefits: "*The worker (a machine equipped with a brain that can be used in special time fragments) will be paid for his sporadic, occasional, temporary benefit. Working hours are sporadic and divided into cells. Future cells are for sale online, and companies can buy as much as they want, without in any way to commit themselves in relation to the social security of the worker*¹⁰" (Berardi, 2014; p. 37). The division of working hours into cells requires much of the employees' attention, leaving them with little time for romance, social relations and participation in the political life of the society. The result is the growth in our use of psychotropic drugs in order to manage our feelings of emptiness and panic that seem to be spreading through the society, affecting even children (Berardi, 2014; p. 38). The examples that we see can no longer be reduced to a problems of stress and depression that affect a small group of people who only need to take the right medication, as capitalism wishes us to believe - it is a sign of an ever-growing existential poverty (Berardi, 2014; p. 43). What was formerly known as a temporary condition and process that most graduates had to endure in order to enter the labour market, has now expanded to become the working condition of many youths and mature workers alike. Our working conditions are no longer comparable with the fantasy that it is only temporary situation for the youth until they work their way up the career ladder; precarity has become the norm (Crisis Mirror, 2016: pp. 15-16). The

¹⁰ Translated from Danish to English by Alia Mohammad

precarious existence has become a poison for the mind, exposing and pushing the precarious subject to the very edge.

Pause and Laziness

Capitalism has sanctified the labour market by separating it from the common use of man, which the working subject can only reach through a contentious series of sacrifices. Profanation thus serves as a counter-apparatus by restoring to common use what once was sacred (Agamben, 2009; p. 19). The problem is that capitalism has removed from common use many activities and things that could serve profanation and free use (Carnera, Draft; p. 8). In other words, profanation means to deactivate or neutralise the apparatus of power, thus leading to an open and unpredicted free use of things, without reducing them to a mere means to an end. Therefore, profanation can be seen as a political and ethical investigation of fundamental values in the society. In this case, profanation means a closer look into how we can neutralise or deactivate the apparatus of the labour market that have produced subjectivity solely focusing on its ability to produce, grow and have a use value for the benefit of the economy. It is a society that favours positivity over negativity, because it is more productive (Carnera, Draft, p. 12). In performance society, governments constantly seek out new ways to improve efficiency and therefore frequently order new reports from various commissions. In April 2014, for example, the government received a report from the Productivity commission into how and why Danes can get more out of their working hours and how working productivity can and should be increased (Nielsen, April 02, 2014).

To profane the holy work would mean not to measure all our activity through a potential use value. Today our existence is bound and measured through our employability and competency. It creates a subject from the human, who must constantly highlight traits that are compatible with the labour market's dogma. It is simultaneously also a de-subjectification process that reduces the subject's access to him/herself as a real individual, who must now identify and become the subject of the employee (Pedersen, 2005; pp. 66-67). Work becomes a virtue and the employee must invest their whole being into their work through constant activity and varied projects, which leads the project worker into a very exposed precariat existence. Even artists are under the same pressure to produce and make sure that their art is visible, to please and

entertain the masses. The problem is that modern work is immaterial and is based on knowledge, consoling, self-management and creativity that force the subject to become part of the commodity production, in a sense the subject and its attributes are the commodity that has become standardised (Carnera, February 2016). The way we use our intellect and bodies does not change the public sphere, but is instead used in producing value, without questioning the nature and the value created. We no longer care about the quality of the services or the value. Even art no longer engages with matters of inequality and contradictions.

According to Arendt, the rise of society moved the admission of household and housekeeping activities from the private to the public realm. Due to the survival of the species and the necessity of life, all matters taken care of in the household now become a part of the public realm. The emergence of society changes the estimate of this sphere, and brings forth the oneness of the human race, where the survival of the species is guaranteed but not that of humanity. The society constitutes the public organisation of the life process, and this is clarified through the importance of the one activity that is necessary to sustain life, namely labour. What is important is that all members of the society consider their behaviours as a way of sustaining their lives and families. The whole of the society is centred around the necessities of life and where labour is transformed from the private realm into the public realm. With the Industrial Revolution and the division of labour, we have become excellent in the labour we perform in public, but our capacity for action and speech has been pushed into the private sphere by the social realm and thereby we have lost many of these qualities. The critical point lies in the necessity of provision of a space, where activity can be exercised and have the room and potential to become excellent (Arendt; 1998; pp.45-49). Virno argues that the tripartitioning of human experience suggested by Arendt has now fallen apart, because much of the labour in post-Ford mode of production lies as absorbed into itself many characteristics of intellectual activity and political action (Virno, 2004; pp. 49-50). The problem is when all our activities are measured by their level of production and economic value, they are reduced to a means and therefore loose autonomy and political potential. Even activities such as reading, studying and even exercising that earlier had an end in themselves are now a means to increase one's employability. The result is that in our project society the value of our labour is conditioned by visibility, and creates a need to communicate *that here something is*

*happening*¹¹, with no regard to its political value or what that something might be (Carnera, February 2016).

Interruption and pause from everyday needs and wishes can offer an opportunity to think about the performance society. Peter Høeg shares his knowledge and experiences of pause and silence with students. According to him, parents tend to have too many projects planned for their children. His lectures are precisely about the unambitious pause that can only be achieved if it does not have any use value. For him, life is about the exchange between activity and pause. The pause allows for a deeper and more intense relation with other people. The reason why pause and silence have become practised by more people is that we are so used to being constantly active that it has become a condition. Moreover, it is to help people with stress symptoms due to a cultivation of individualisation, performance and workload (Andersen, October 12, 2015). Pause and to be temporary idle should then not be viewed as laziness, as not doing anything but rather as a way of bringing attention to activities that should not be measured based on their monetary and production values (Carnera, February 2016). As mentioned, due to the norm of positivity in the Performance society the employees have sacrificed their impotentiality in order to be included in the sacred labour market. Laziness, however, allows for a different use of this separation, because it preserves potentiality instead of reducing it to a notion of actuality. A refusal to work should not then be viewed as a preservation of potentiality, on the contrary, it exceeds it: *As Deleuze suggests, the formula ‘I would prefer not to’ thus opens a zone of indistinction between yes and no, the preferable and the nonpreferable. But also - in the context that interests us - between the potential to be (or do) and the potential not to be (or do)’. He is, in other words, embodying a line of flight, an exodus in order to remain (im)potential.* (Lewis, 2011; p. 9). In a performance society that values activity, this refusal might seem as inactivity or passivity. However, according to Agamben, this refusal to work preserves potentiality against the act of exploitive labour, thus allowing the reconsideration and reconstruction of labour and subjectivity. It is a mode different to the project society, who must constantly be involved in new projects because he/she is always looking for a way to increase his/her competence, which is transparent with clear purpose and consequences and therefore already exhausted (Lewis, 2011; p. 9).

¹¹ Translated from Danish to English by Alia Mohammad

Precarity has the potential to change the way we view work in project society, by differentiating between work and labour, which is a means to reproduction and survival. This is an important step to ensure a decrease in the importance we give to our activities on the labour market, whereby the means of production will no longer be seen as the purpose of human activity. The need for constant production eliminates the room for hesitation, reflection, and political action, which is why laziness and temporary idleness can become a way of deactivating the apparatus of power. Precarity can introduce the individual to a different understanding of accomplishment that is not limited to the sphere of labour. In the ancient world, leisure and free time were considered the time for the accomplishment of highest human possibility that allowed participation in the matters of the polis (Carnera, February 2016).

Precarity as Remedy

The precariate contains a potential to challenge the values of work culture that has dominated the performance society. However, this requires a political awareness and a recognition of the precariat's abilities that sets it apart from other classes. One of the ways the precariat has changed the economy through profanation of private property and ownership - the concept of Sharing economy, which is based on getting access to different and overlooked resources rather than ownership. The third industrial revolution is about *the collaborative commons*, which is the new collaborative and sharing community that is connected through the use of technologies. According to Jeremy Rifkin's sharing economy is a sign of the end of capitalism, as we know it. According to sharing economy, it started as a way for the precariat to find another income source in addition to its low-paid job (Magelund, 2015; p. 1-4). Through sharing economy can give a better and more direct contact between people who can together build more humanly meaningful communities, that rethink our values and how we perceive ourselves (Magelund, 2015; p. 6).

At the end of the documentary Wan Chao had to leave his bedroom in favour of a dormitory which he will share with two friends. Wan Chao nonetheless seemed happy to have this option since it means that he would no longer have to worry about his rent (Chen, 2012). His change of attitude is clear from not even allowing his friends to comfort him to a state of openness to their offer. His situation matches that of many million 'ants' living in the big cities of China, who share everything from rooms to

communal bathrooms and try to encourage each other to survive the city. These are youths who have changed the very architecture of the cities creating housing opportunities in unforeseen places. Their living situation has also motivated them to find new uses for things by breaking the *logic of consumption-disposal (buying-throwing away) but by free use*. (Carnera, Draft; pp. 7-8). It is important to remember that sharing economy is still in its very beginning and can be developed into a more flexible version of capitalism rather than building on a market foundation of solidarity. According Anders N. Magelund, an investigation into possible legislation that can ensure the benefit of the masses should be considered (Magelund, 2015 pp. 5-7).

Precarious working conditions have been developed through the capitalist response and colonisation of the 60s demand for more *creativity, freedom, “less work- more money”*, *the refusal to work (Crisis Mirror, 2016; p. 48)*. ‘Creative production’ in neo-liberalism was formed into the precariat and has become a counter figure to the Fordist labour. However, the demands for more refusal of work, freedom and creativity are still very much relevant today. The precariat contains the possibility to bring forth a change in the relations of production and society, labour market and its production of the subject of employee (*Crisis Mirror, 2016; p. 48-49*). Many choose to live a precarious existence because it gives them the freedom to monitor their working hours based on their needs, where they can monitor its intensity. The precariat can no longer identify itself with one workplace due to the temporary nature of its employment making the process of internalisation of the work place’s value more difficult. This allows the opportunity to build a subjectivity based on other aspects of life rather than work.

The term pharmakon allows a more dynamic concept of Precariat, which can be viewed as simultaneously both a remedy and poison, without excluding the other parts, thereby making the precariat figure irreducible and ambivalent since it contains its own opposite (Johnson, 2014; p. 7). The precariat existence can be viewed as a poison due to its potential to become stressful, insecure and lead the individual into poverty and exclusion from the society. However, at the same time, the precariat can be a remedy for the subject as it has a capacity for political action, that will not just change the working and economic conditions but all aspects of our lives by rethinking and revaluating the sanctification of work (Crisis Mirror, 2016; p. 49).

Precarity and Form-of-life

In the following section, there will be an investigation of Guy Standing's Politics of Paradise and how some of his ideas and proposals are slowly being incorporated into society and politics. Additionally, there will be a closer look into the relevance of Standing's suggestions through Agamben's notion of 'whatever singularities'. In particular, this will be through a discussion of precariat subjectivity as a category of options.

One of Standing's main solutions is to stop the commodification of education and universities, so that education can be pursued for its own sake in order to make *capable and cultivated human beings* (Standing, 2014; pp. 274-276). As mentioned, the problem with education is that it is sold as an investment good without economic return for most. The neoliberal state constantly pushes education towards 'human capital' formation and job preparation (Standing, p. 115-116). The purpose of education has become the sphere where students are to develop a set of competences that the labour market has deemed valuable, thus making education a means to an end. In the learning society, on the one hand the instability of the economic situation and the ever-changing market require flexibility and the ability to adapt to new situation quickly, on the other, policymakers constantly try to narrow the field of education by directing it to the market's needs. Universities are required to meet the demand of the market in order to remain relevant. Which suggests the question: If the market were ever changing, would flexibility not be best taught through studying rather than learning specific and predefined skills? This seems to present an element of a *self-engendered-paradox*; universities are to meet the labour markets needs for flexible and creative future employees by offering them a set of predefined competences that have already been exhausted. It appears that what has been presented as a cure takes the form of a poison that has caused the sickness, in this case employability and the precarious existence (Johnsen, 2014; pp. 3, 15). Moreover, it would suggest that studying allows the student to engage and reengage with a given field. It requires a poetic wonder that allows the showcasing of something new within the same, which requires both insight and knowledge of the individual, to waver between one's potentiality and impotentiality. "*Experience is not only a possession of certain abilities or skills but the name of the process that leads to insight because it is linked to an intimate relationship with the peculiar*" (Carnera, June 2012). Experience and

knowledge should not be reduced to a means to an end, but should be end in themselves to permit contemplation, creativity and an open horizons. The education society, however, restricts the student's horizon, by fixing its gaze on employability and economic value.

According to Standing, work must be redefined and separated from job and labour. Someone out of a job might still have valuable work that cannot be measured through monetary systems. Some periods of idleness should not be viewed as wasteful or without value (Standing, 2012; pp. 276-277). To surmount the fact that temporary idleness or work that does not produce income he suggests basic income to all residence of the country. This will give everyone the freedom and the ability to live as they wish without being bound by necessity (Standing, 2012; p. 276-277). It is a suggestion that the tech-elite of Silicon Valley support, since new technologies are making jobs disappear and increasing the number of precariat workers. It has been estimated that, by the next decade, 47% of 700 types of occupation will be replaced by robots. The basic income should be enough to cover rent, food and health insurance. However, basic income should be brought about by the people who need it the most, rather than those who have created the resulting problems (Thorup, January 26, 2016). Basic income has now been introduced and tested in both Finland and Holland and has been put to a vote in Switzerland (Thorup, January 02, 2016). In Denmark, Alternativet (political party) wishes to replace social security payments with basic income to reduce the complexity and bureaucracy of the system (Alternativet.dk). However, Alternativet's system is not a universal one that will cover every resident in the country. Standing's point is precisely that basic income should become a right and not a charity given to few who need it the most, in order for it to work, so that those who wish to engage in work outside the labour market cannot be demonised (Standing, 9th February 2016).

If the precariat wishes to have a political voice, it must be institutionally represented (Standing, 2014; p. 286). Furthermore, Standing argues that the precariat is most exposed to the crisis of identity, and this is why it must recover it, and recognise that we have multiple identities that should be defended through political institutions and policies. The question of identity is especially important for the precarius worker, since it doesn't have an occupational identity. However, the precariat must go even

further and become a class-for-itself (Standing, 2014; pp. 273-274). Guy Standing's proposition can be seen as a continuation of what has been done in the past. However, this proposal could weaken precariat's critique and reduce its potential to challenge and rethink the performance society's values.

The precariat should not be subject to an identity or a specific organisational form because its plurality can also be a strength and not only a weakness. To become a member of the precariat class and fully identify with it would again be a de-subjectification of the individual, where it becomes bound to identify with the precariat as a class and its concepts. However, as mentioned before, the precariat has the potential to - for the first time in history - succeed in becoming a singularity without identity *a common and absolutely exposed singularity* (Agamben II, 2009; p. 65). It does not become a matter of belonging and identifying with a specific class, but a way of rethinking the social project. Rather than a class, Agamben introduces the notion of community, which consists of 'whatever singularities' that are bounded by a co-belonging and not a declaration of identity (C. Mills). He defines 'whatever singularities' as: *has no identity, it is not determined with respect to a concept, but neither is it simply indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to an idea, that is, to the totality of its possibilities* (Agamben II, 2009; p. 67). To not be bound by a fixed class the precariat figure can truly become free, where it can rethink itself without the urge to choose this or that identity because it is driven by an openness towards the diversity that traverses it (Carnera, 2014). Form-of-life is a human life that is open to possibilities and not driven by necessities. It is a way of being that is free to explore its negativity and limits, without being assigned a predetermined destiny. In other words, Form-of-life challenges the biopolitic's separation between zoe and bios, and is a politics of pure means, that does not separate human life (zoe) from its form (bios). The precariat figure therefore is an ambivalent figure that is in the grey area between zoe and bios, is both exposed and contains possibility to: *"it defines a life – human life – in which the single ways, acts, and process of living are never simply facts but always and above all possibilities of life, always and above all power"* (Agamben, 1996; p. 4).

Conclusion

The commodification of education has become a worldwide phenomenon, where some universities tend to compete on club-like amenities in order to attract more students. Governments around the world push the universities to meet the demands and the needs of the labour market, through a constant re-evaluation of their study programs. The main focus is not to improve the students' general education, but rather to offer them a specific set of competences that are deemed important by the labour market. The students enter colleges and universities in the hope of becoming part of the famous middle-class, in other words, both universities and students' main aim is to increase their employability. In the words of Agamben, the universities view the student as an endless potential that must be actualised for the benefit of the labour market. Through education a child or student goes through a process of alteration in order to become someone else, namely to become an employee. What must be sacrificed is the individual's impotentiality, which is the ability to be in relation of one's own lack. It is an altogether different process than competence development, which is already transparent and exhausted with a clear beginning and end. After graduation, students obtain a set of competences and are left in debt with little prospect of a career-promoting job, thus making education a youth trap that will lead to precarity.

The precariat figure is a pharmakon, both remedy and poison. It is an ambivalent figure that can be both exposure and possibilities. Often jobs and labour are mistaken for work and hold the promise of self-realisation and identity, and as the only way one can contribute to the society. This exposes and excludes the precariat figure since it reduces them to their natural life with no political voice. However, the precariat subject has also the potential of great political action and change. The precariat can rethink the education system and break with the Performance society by questioning its underlying value that can only be measured through economic standards, which reduce the individual to a means to an end. However, as Agamben notes, human life should not be reduced to a means, it already contains possibilities that are not predefined nor determined. Therefore, it has the potential to have an open and experimental approach to work, with contributing values that precede economic, and which do not de-subjectify the individual into this or that identity that have the obligation of proving

useful to the labour market. The precariat thus opens up to the Coming Community that consists of whatever singularities.

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