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Crisis: implications for sociological theorising of work and society

The crisis continues to cascade from finance to the economy to the fiscal to exacerbation of intersecting inequalities to political turbulence and to violence. Gender and ethnic relations in work are being transformed, as well as those of class. Understanding the contested transformation of work (paid and unpaid; market and state) is central but not sufficient. It requires locating work within a theory of society. How should sociological theories of society be re-thought in the context of this crisis? The response to over-simplified metanarratives of progress (sometimes attributed to classical sociology) has often been to reject the macro concept of society as a system and replace it with micro level analysis of agency or loose notions of network or assemblage. Yet, the crisis cannot be understood without a theory of society that theorises the links between different institutions (economy, polity, civil society and violence). The tendency to segregate the analyses of economy and violence needs to be rethought. The paper argues for rethinking approaches to society as a social system using complexity theory; and for greater attention to the concept of 'crisis'. It seeks to contribute to the development of sociology as a space to imagine alternative futures. The analysis of the contested transformation of work in the context of society is central to this endeavour.

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