

Introduction

In 1985 Claus Offe questioned the key role of work in societies in his article titled *Work: The key sociological Category?*. The purpose of my reflections here is to reconsider the role of work and to sketch some characteristics and issues of late modern societies that suggest that work remains or has once more become a key sociological category. This argument depends, of course, on the definition of what a key role is. Durkheim's question of a changing social division of labour and subsequently questions of changing forms of solidarity, social cohesion or integration seems very useful and I will return to it throughout this paper. Part of my reflections here is that economic sociology has lost sight of sociological questions that concern the overall architecture of late modern societies and how economic developments influence the way these societies are held together, or are at risk of disintegrating. There is a need to develop or focus on sociological tools or categories to critically assess contemporary work societies.

Work as a key sociological category

30 years of neoliberal economic reforms have not only transformed the economy, they have also changed society. Thanks to this neoliberal agenda of privatisation, deregulation, marketisation and corporatisation work and employment have become central and indispensable building blocks of late modern capitalist societies. But the picture is more complex and ambiguous. Obviously, work is a primary area of cost cutting and productivity gains. Less obviously but equally relevant, the economy and more specifically employment are seen as major if not *the* central integrating forces of society. Both, the individual and overall society depend heavily on them for income and meaning. I believe that one of the key roles of economic sociology is to unpack and disentangle these kinds of ambiguities in order to develop an understanding of the kind of work societies we live in today. However, sociology, generally, and economic sociology, in particular, are shying away from calling late

modern societies work societies. I want to argue that they are more than ever work societies and they are work societies of a particular kind. This paper tries therefore to sketch what kind of work society we live in using Durkheim's approach to social change by looking at the nature of a changing social division of labour to which I will refer as hyper-differentiation, while at the same time asking what holds societies together as their form of differentiation changes.

The central role of work and employment became clear, for example, during the recent global financial crisis after 2008, when keeping people employed was one of the major focuses of governments while corporations were quick to use the crisis to cut jobs. Employment is of course a good way of keeping society and people equally afloat. What employment means is, however, a different question. The emphasis on employment easily overlooks that employment alone does not necessarily ensure social cohesion, equality, human rights, a good quality of life, a peaceful society or a particular democratically functioning public sphere. As a matter of fact it might achieve the opposite. Sociology has neglected this Durkheimian question in relation to a changing world of work. The fundamental ambiguity here lies within market forces that pull societies apart (unemployment as a result of cost cutting for example) while they are also portrayed as one of the most important aspects that hold them together (employment). To be sure, this ambiguity does affect more than one area of a society and is by no means restricted to the economy. Sociological concepts that can help to capture some of these changes and consequences along those lines are differentiation and integration. It is important to note that questions of differentiation and integration are questions of vital importance not for the sake of sociology but for how societies operate and individuals can live their lives. It sounds trivial but these entities are often even sociologically taken for granted. The point to keep in mind maybe is this: what is the point of having or referring to entities like society or individual without unpacking the relational, processual, interdependent and ever changing characteristics of the taken for granted that shape both, the

individual and society and thus the world we live in? This is what the questions of differentiation and integration can help to address and I believe work and employment play a crucial role in this complex interplay.

There is no lack of specialised and detailed studies of workplaces, of management techniques, for example, of call centres or sweatshops. It is, however, the overall social architecture within which these workplace developments are embedded that is of interest here and that defines contemporary work societies. It is not enough to label this architecture simply as neoliberal. As a matter of fact it might be irrelevant. What matters sociologically is what is under the hood. This is rarely critically evaluated or assessed as concepts like alienation, for example, are all too easily dismissed as old-fashioned or outdated. In a political climate where employment is regarded as a panacea against all evils of our time, the following questions are equally ignored: 'What is work'? or 'What do we actually work for?', 'How does work make human beings feel'? The value of work as a normative question is taken for granted as a question that is only of economic concern. The normative value of work has been turned into an almost unquestioned and uncontested territory. At this juncture, then, it is important to ask what *is* the relationship between the individual and work in late modern societies? The fact that work is everywhere, as it seeps through every aspect of our lives and every corner of our societies, could allow us great insights into work as a social lubricant or glue between otherwise (and maybe wrongly) separated areas or spheres of society. Again, what I want to suggest is that economic sociology can gain some insights into these normative underpinnings of work and employment through questions of differentiation and integration.

To ask "what kind of society do we live in?" means to ask what are the characteristics of the forces, dynamics and social interactions that hold something together that is more than the sum of its individual parts. To be very clear, integration is not about homogeneity, conformity; a monolithic or clear-cut entity.

Neither is it the desire to create exactly that as an imagined community or a nostalgic look backwards at something that was once there but has now been lost. In its broadest sense integration is about relationships, whether between human beings, human beings and nature, objects, or as a matter of fact anything else we have relationships with which end up defining our way of living together. Integration cannot be about homogeneity but needs difference, disagreement and unpredictability. Without these integration does not emerge as a question in the first place making the formation of consensus or normative agreement if not a necessity then at least a possibility.

Towards a normative critique of work societies

The approach that I would like to propose here is a normative critique of late modern work societies. One of the concerns in regard to contemporary work societies is that the mainly unquestioned approach to work and employment resonates with what the early Frankfurt School called a totally administered society or the eclipse of reason. Maybe contemporary societies could be conceptualised as total work societies. However, my aim here is not to re-establish a negative and pessimistic sociological dead end analysis as the Frankfurt School partly did. Economic sociology's analysis of late modern work societies has to focus on the risk of social pathologies. These pathologies cannot but lie in the communicative structures of society in a Habermasian sense. This includes the possibilities to normatively self-organise social life resulting, for example, in discussions of the above mentioned questions about the meaning or value of work. The communicative possibilities are equally where the hopes for a more emancipated society lie. These possibilities exist and should not be overwritten by all too negative diagnostics to which sociology historically lends itself all too easily. Neither should they be shut up by an artificial division of life and work, instrumental and communicative action. The crucial point in defining what a normative critique is, and equally what social pathologies are, lies in the accessibility of norms and values

as publicly negotiable and re-negotiable and this also goes for norms defining work. This can also be referred to as politisation, to which I will return later in more detail, enabling social integration. As a working definition I suggest to talk about integration generally as a way of participating in and contributing to the reproduction of society. More specifically I suggest that we can talk about social integration on the one hand, when people generally have an opportunity to participate in and contribute to the negotiation and renegotiation of norms and values, that is, the normative reproduction of society. Systemic integration, on the other hand, refers to how people can participate in the reproduction of norms and values that are either non-negotiable or almost inaccessible in order to be renegotiated.

From Work to communication to a politisation of work

I return to the aforementioned Offe article at this point. He argues with the aid of Habermas that work has lost its key role as an integrating force in society (Offe 1985: 148-49). Habermas in particular has suggested nothing less than a paradigm change when it comes to the role of work in society. In reference to Marx he states:

Whereas Marx localised the learning processes important for evolution in the dimension of objectivating thought – of technical and organisational knowledge, of instrumental and strategic action, in short, of *productive forces* – there are good reasons meanwhile for assuming that learning processes also take place in the dimension of moral insight, practical knowledge, communicative action, and the consensual regulation of action conflicts – learning processes that are deposited in more mature forms of social integration, in new *productive relations*, and that in turn first make possible the introduction of new productive forces. (1979: 97-98)

The decisive point is that Marx regards society and intersubjectivity as materially produced, while Habermas considers both as “linguistically established” (1979: 99). The latter regards work or material production not only as insufficient to account for the evolution of society, but as secondary to communicative action. As he states:

“[S]trategic action must be institutionalised, that is, embedded in intersubjectively binding norms” (Habermas 1979: 118). With this shift, Habermas leaves the materially based view on social evolution behind and advances:

The thesis that the development of these normative structures is the pacemaker of social evolution, for new principles of social organisation mean new forms of social integration; and the latter, in turn, first make it possible to implement available productive forces or to generate new ones, as well as making possible a heightening of social complexity. (1979: 120)

Work as an integrating force has been replaced by communication, here, which seems to contradict the spirit of the times in the first decade of the 21st century where the first and foremost priority for societies to function appears to be work and employment. What defines work societies is ultimately the fact that work is an essential part of people participating in both the normative and the material reproduction of society. Economic sociology, along the lines of Habermas’ argument, has to acknowledge that communication has not replaced work as an integrating force. Moreover, in this vein of thought communicative structures have been pushed back, marginalised and sidelined as hampering a prosperous economy, including employment opportunities. Neither has work come to an end, as Rifkin, Gorz, Beck, Habermas and others have suggested.

Three basic points can be made in reference to this. Firstly, work societies fear the loss of that which holds them together, work and neo-liberalism has increased that fear, and in particular on an individual level. And to be clear, a possible end of work goes much further than the simple fact of individuals being unemployed. A possible end of work threatens our entire way of life. Secondly, the fear of losing work as an integrating force has transformed it into a de-politicised territory where reason has been equated with profit. As Max Frisch writes: “Whatever is profitable is reasonable”¹ (1990: 465, translation NE). And thirdly, work has not come to an end

¹ ‘Vernünftig ist, was rentiert.’

but its distribution has become polarised. The spectrum of this polarisation goes from those who have work having too much work to those who want to work but are either underemployed or persistently unemployed. This latter outcome is mainly due to the relentless pursuit of cost cutting in the area of employment and taxation in favour of corporations. All three points prioritise work as a systemically integrating force, while the normative aspects, and the channels for a politisation of the norms and values underpinning the role and distribution of work, are deficient or absent. Contemporary work societies give priority to systemic integration, while they are deficient in social integration. Thus, the proclaimed paradigm shift as Habermas indicated it has not (yet?) happened but is more than ever a counterfactual hope. For the classics, work was the key sociological category. For Offe and Habermas, communication replaced work in that key role. My argument is that neo-liberalism has reinstalled work (if it was ever uninstalled) maybe not as *the* key sociological category but certainly as a key sociological category, and certainly worthy of further sociological consideration along the lines proposed here. Moreover, my point is that work and communication are not exclusive as key sociological categories. A politisation of work, a negotiation of the norms and values underpinning work, acknowledges both as equally important. Work should be embedded in communicatively established norms and values.

Hyper-differentiation: The late modern condition

At this point it makes sense to have a closer look at questions of differentiation or what I call 'the late modern condition'. By this I mean that late modern societies can be referred to as hyper-differentiated, that is, increased levels of individual choice and complexities. In everyday life this can range from insurance claims to applications for residential parking permits, to shopping around for an affordable overseas flight, to juggling childcare and full-time employment, to trying to be politically informed, to getting legal advice on a prenuptial agreement, etc. Managing our lives has become a time-consuming and busy affair. And again we

can explore this with the aid of the classics, in this case Durkheim. Durkheim's idea of a social division of labour is about the changing forms of differentiation and integration in emerging modern societies. More specifically, Durkheim argues that with a changing social division of labour, the forms of integration change too, in his case from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. Drawing on Durkheim's view of integration at this point is not a return to the classics for the sake of sociological nostalgia. Instead, Durkheim poses a pervasive question of absolute contemporary relevance, one which remains at the heart of meaningful sociological analyses. Accordingly, the pressing questions for contemporary economic sociology are: What characterises the late modern social division of labour? And what are the existing, changing, or emerging forms of integration or disintegration? These are, in my opinion, the crucial questions for an analysis of contemporary work societies. They can be explored further again with the aid of Habermas who refines Durkheim's idea of a social division of labour with his idea of the uncoupling of systems and lifeworlds.

More specifically, the late modern social division of labour is characterised by hyper-differentiation. What this means is that both, systems and lifeworlds have been pluralised or maybe even fragmented, compartmentalised or splintered. According to Habermas, systems emerge from a communicative overload of the lifeworld in order to relief the overworked communicative capacities of the lifeworld. This is what Habermas refers to as the uncoupling of systems and lifeworlds. In late modern societies, however, what needs to be negotiated in the lifeworld has increased in intensity and number. This is due to well-known and widely defined processes like disenchantment or detraditionalisation. As a consequence, the normative questions have intensified which includes questions of belief, lifestyle, space, relationships amongst other areas that used to be much more set or even ascribed by tradition or rules.

But hyper-differentiation does not only mean normative pluralisation. That in itself would not be the biggest challenge. In addition to increased levels of choice, systems offload their increased complexity into the lifeworld as systemic imperatives. Bureaucracies and work organisations alike try to reduce their complexities in order to gain or regain power, efficiency, productivity or profit. They do not do so consciously but simply ensure their continuation. As mentioned above, this can range from insurance claims to applications for residential parking permits or questions about childcare and full-time employment. Our lives have become systemically and normatively more complex. Under those circumstances the ability to normatively negotiate any question in society becomes sidelined. The main point of engagement for individuals as well as organisations becomes the dealing and coping with systemic complexities. The complexities are overwhelming our abilities to address the normative underpinnings of those complexities. The boundaries between hyper-differentiated lifeworlds and systems become blurred and it is the coping with the blurry boundaries that takes priority over the politisation of norms and values. This leads to a de-politicised and unquestioned dealing with systemic processes, while genuine politisation, and with it social integration, is marginalised if not silenced. While this bears the risk of a colonisation of the lifeworld by systemic processes, it goes beyond that. The complexities of both hyper-differentiated lifeworlds and systems stall and choke each other. The relay, that is, communicative structures, between them is overheating or at risk of failing. The translation of communicative processes into systemic processes in order to reduce normative complexities is stuttering and, as a consequence, the complexities on both sides increase and amount to hyper-differentiation as *the* late-modern condition. The uncoupling has turned into hyper-differentiation.

This can be made clearer with the aid of Niklas Luhmann. One of the main points in his systems theory is the reduction of complexity:

The function of social systems is to capture and reduce complexity. They help to mediate between the external complexity of the world and the anthropologically very restricted ability of human beings to consciously process experiences. (1974: 116, translation NE)

Habermas agrees to a large extent with Luhmann on that point. However, he also disagrees on a fundamental point. The idea of a reduction of complexity leads to a paradoxical situation for Habermas as the reduction of complexity in one system leads to an increase in complexity in another system (Schimank 1996: 138). This is basically an extension of Weber's idea of an irreconcilable rationalisation of various value spheres where the rationalisation of one value sphere can lead to irrationalities in other value spheres to which the response is more rationalisation. Beck refers to this on a bigger social scale as reflexive or second modernity.

However, the reduction of complexities in Luhmann's approach could also be described as de-differentiation within any particular system. In order to maintain its systemic continuity the economic system, for example, treats everything on the basis of its fundamental value in Weberian terms or its binary code in Luhmann's terms, that is, loss or profit. The increasing commodification of almost everything, including climate change and the green lifestyle, could be looked at from that point of view. Similarly, Human Resource departments perceive human beings and their qualities as economic resources on that basis. For the psychic system, however, this might increase complexities in the form of stress levels to which it might respond with a reduction of complexities that trigger a response in the family system or the economic system. Hence, hyper-differentiation is not just a pluralisation of norms, values and systemic imperatives; neither is it just a colonisation of the lifeworld. It paradoxically works hand in glove with de-differentiation as every system tries to maintain its existence and functioning but cannot do so independently from other systems. The crucial point is that the reduction of complexity (with de-differentiation turning everything into a commodity or into a psychological issue

which might explain the rise of therapy cultures in contemporary societies) increases the complexity for other systems, resulting in hyper-differentiation.

Integration, precariousness and individualisation

Hyper-differentiation leaves us with the question of integration. If late modern societies are hyper-differentiated, what holds them together? It is important to note, in this vein, that hyper-differentiation does not mean disintegration, and here I come back to the second part of the Durkheimian question regarding the changing forms of integration as a consequence of a changing social division of labour. More precisely, we can now ask: What forms of integration exist or emerge in late-modern societies with a hyper-differentiated social division of labour? The relationship between hyper-differentiation and challenged forms of integration is also the nucleus of precariousness, a concept that is mainly used to describe particular kinds of employment as in unstable, insecure or casual forms of employment. My argument is that precariousness goes beyond the workplace the reason being that all areas of society depend more or less on work and employment. What is ultimately precarious is not only work and the forms of employment itself but the whole of society, that is, its forms of integration. Late modern work societies are precarious work societies *because* they are hyper-differentiated and subsequently their forms of integration and social cohesion are fragile. This might be the case because of fast-paced social changes or societies have become anomic in the Durkheimian sense, that is, the social division of labour is of a pathological nature and does not generate healthy forms of integration. One could also argue at this point that while systemic interdependences intensify they only hold late modern societies together loosely.

One topic where this becomes clear is the issue of individualisation. Individualisation is characterised by many aspects, but I want to focus here on integration as a specifically individual task. In this sense, individualisation means to individually cope and deal with systemic imperatives that, as discussed, are a consequence of hyper-differentiation, of the stuttering translation of communicative

processes into meaningful and healthy systemic relief mechanisms. Equally, de-differentiation results in the pushing of systemic imperatives (economic or other) into individuals' lifeworlds. In any case, the complexities that are shifted out of systems to ensure systemic continuity and integration have to be dealt with individually. However, what has to be dealt with individually in precarious work societies are normative and systemic complexities. What takes priorities in this struggle is the dealing with systemic integration, that is, the responsibilities for employment or income. Individualisation in that sense is at risk of being the manifestation of a social pathology rather than a liberation of the individual from industrial or post-industrial structures.

Another example for systemic integration taking priority over social integration are organisational memberships through which individuals try to integrate themselves here and there, not into overall society, but in various spheres or subsystems. The crucial point in this is whether individuals gain memberships on the basis of a normative infrastructure they themselves negotiate or whether organisational membership is based on the compulsion to deal with systemic imperatives individually. In that case it equals an individual implementation of non-negotiable systemic rules. The role of individuals is one of becoming active hubs for coordinating systemic imperatives, for example, to accept completely flexible working hours. Accordingly, I argue that whether organisational integration leads to social integration or systemic coordination depends on the ability of individuals to negotiate the norms that underpin and define the purpose of an organisation. Based on systemically defined membership roles, individuals succumb to organisational norms and values that force them to individually interpret rather than negotiate rules and norms in order to ensure systemic integration. The dependence on organisational memberships again points towards contemporary work societies as precarious work societies. Precariousness here points at imbalances in the distribution of power to actually negotiate norms and values. Both,

individualisation and organisational membership tend to emphasise systemic integration while social integration remains deficient.

Politisation

Deficiencies in social integration means a lack of opportunities and channels to negotiate and re-negotiate norms and values. In the case of work this means that work as a norm, the negotiation of the value of work is depoliticised, that is, inaccessible to normative discussions in the public sphere. This includes discussions about work ethics. Maria Markus, writing about the politisation of needs, describes what politisation means in the first place.

The genuine *politisation of needs* has occurred only when ... the question of needs has been brought into a *public discourse* (or perhaps rather discourses) and became a subject of *contestation*. Such contestation has to be understood not purely in terms of negotiations concerning the satisfaction of needs (its modes and levels), but extends to questioning of their interpretation as well as of the competence of different public institutions and bodies to take over such interpretations. Politisation of needs, in this sense, means the *recognition of the contingent nature of needs* and the awareness of their interconnection with the process of individual and collective *identity formation* and with *different ways of life*. (Markus 1995: 168)

Habermas has described this elsewhere as the 'detour through norms'. Hence, employment is more or less only the systemic side of integration and does not automatically generate opportunities for social integration. The politisation of norms and values, in this case norms and values about work and employment, needs to be included although it appears to be more difficult to realise. But as mentioned before, social integration on the basis of a genuine politisation is not supposed to be a smooth unproblematic process. The fact is that in contemporary work societies public discourses on the meaning of work, other than its relevance for the functioning of systems, is largely absent or quickly sidelined by powerful economic players. The lack of communicative structures or these structures being dominated by economic forces points at work as a depoliticised sphere. The

obstruction and marginalisation of normative discourses thus amounts again to social pathologies which means systemic aspects take priority over normative questions that can be negotiated. As a consequence the current economic systems and the political apparatus also face a legitimisation crisis. The meaning of social pathology here is therefore twofold. Firstly, public discourses on work or the economy are sidelined by systemic priorities. Secondly, both the political sphere and the economic sphere are at risk of losing their legitimisation on the basis of a society's capacities for self-organisation. This includes individual capacities and qualities to politise to which I will turn now in more detail.

Individualisation again

To return to a point I raised earlier; central to an analysis of contemporary work societies are individual experiences of work. Individuals are the ones who have to deal with hyper-differentiated and precarious work societies. Here work itself becomes a rather messy and ambiguous concept. Work gives us an income and it can equally be alienating. There are monotonous aspects as well as creative ones in work. Work can be both fulfilling and emotionally draining. Potentially work is a means for self-realisation, while it also bears a great risk of instrumentalisation. Work constrains as well as enables individual autonomy. From this point of view, work is a very ambiguous category. Work therefore involves human beings on a deep level with particular qualities and capabilities. The ambiguities of work as well as the experience of work as human beings (in Marx's term species being) can be traced along the following lines.

1. Communicative ability: Individuals have the ability to communicate and therefore to negotiate and re-negotiate norms and values in line with the more general notion of politisation and social integration I raised above. This is an essential component for successful social integration that includes giving instructions and receiving information as well. Not every flow of information is about negotiating norms and values but is equally about understanding and

following systemic imperatives. Politisation seems to be the crucial link between articulating one's needs and accepting collectively agreed upon needs.

2. Social experience and learning (socialisation): As we grow up we learn and experience the norms and values of a culture but we also teach others those norms and values. Thus, we socialise others but also internalise existing beliefs and values. We shape others and others shape us; we shape society and society shapes us; we experience others and they experience us. This too goes for both, negotiable as well as non-negotiable norms and values.
3. Autonomy: On the one hand, individuals are capable of using autonomy and independence as a relationally defined space to reflectively and actively engage with others beyond the learned social experiences with others. On the other hand, this also means that we are open to adaptation, manipulation and instrumentalisation as systemically inflicted compulsory choices.
4. Reflexivity means that individuals are able to process information, make own judgements and be self-responsible. But it can also mean that we become active hubs for systemic coordination or pre-given goals where individuals act reflexively rather than reflectively. Reflexively meaning individuals react to systemic imperatives or internalise pre-given values as their own and realise them for an organisation or institution; reflectively referring to the ability to think about the norms and values underpinning a particular action or reaction before reacting.
5. Social actor: Individuals are able to act on the basis of their own thoughts and reflections but are also capable of being an agent for institutions or organisations. These two processes are deeply intermeshed and often economic sociology has tried to separate them. It is, however, hard to separate one from the other when we work. We are creative while we might also act on behalf of an organisation.

6. Social recognition: The process of granting and being granted social recognition can be based on publicly accessible norms and values, but also on systemically inaccessible, often socially or organisationally prescribed work ethics and norms (corporate culture). Being recognised is a positive feeling and again it is not easy (and maybe not even desirable) to separate recognition for useful contributions that we make on the basis of negotiable or non-negotiable values. The decisive point might be whether the norms and values on the basis of which recognition is granted are of a consensual nature.

Every one of those aspects is ambiguous in relation to work and social or systemic integration. I am by no means certain where to draw the line between social and systemic aspects here. And yet, these ambiguities help to understand how messy and precarious work as a sociological category is, and how deeply involved in it we are. Moreover, they help to analyse the individual experience of work in contemporary work societies and how individuals find themselves in precarious situations. By looking to the foundations of late modern societies as precarious, that is, hyper-differentiated, we are then able to contextualise and better understand the precarious nature of work. In doing so, we avoid sidelining work's role in late modern societies either as the panacea for everything or as irrelevant and replaced by communication. Neither of those approaches does justice to the current role of work in late modern societies.

On the basis of those ambiguous aspects of the self or qualities and capabilities of the individual we can evaluate the role of individuals in precarious work societies. Firstly, what individuals do and can do is dependent on and enabled by the structures of societies. Structures are, in this sense, not only constraining and restricting but also enabling, a process I refer to as structurally enabled individualisation. Secondly, the norms and values of a society are shaped by individuals. Individuals have the abilities and capabilities to contribute to and participate in politisation, that is, the negotiation and re-negotiation of a society's

normative infrastructure resulting in social integration. I refer to this second aspect as normative individualisation. Thirdly, in late modern work societies systemic imperatives are increasing on an organisational and institutional level. Shifting those imperatives and complexities onto individuals and making them their responsibility (often through membership roles) can be referred to as organised individualisation. This, however, results mainly in systemic integration and creates deficiencies of social integration. In the latter case the consequence is that integration as well as politisation emerge as precarious.

Conclusion: towards a precarious work society

Work might no longer be considered *the* key sociological category by some. I have argued that it still is a key sociological category. It plays a major role in differentiation and integration in late modern societies. Work is a key sociological category in the sense that it carries both normative as well as systemic questions. Thus, Habermas' paradigm shift needs some refinement. It is not a total shift towards communication as the primary integrating force. It is the politisation of work that can combine both socially and systemically integrating questions. This, however, requires that work is not an unquestioned and sealed off systemic value but that the norms and values underpinning work can be negotiated and re-negotiated publicly. The central question for a meaningful analysis of contemporary work societies is the Durkheimian question of a changing social division of labour and subsequently changing forms of integration. I have attempted here to sketch hyper-differentiation as the characteristic of a late modern social division of labour, and individualisation not as a form of integration but at least as one of the major consequences of hyper-differentiation. While integration on that level might not be completely unsuccessful, it is in the very least precarious. Both systemic and social forms of integration are fragile and precarious. Late modern societies can be described as work societies of a particular kind. They are hyper-differentiated, precarious and highly individualised. On the level of integration however,

precarious work societies are at a high risk of being de-politicised societies characterised by social pathologies in their communicative structures. Most importantly, I would like to suggest that investigations into contemporary work societies have to start identifying social pathologies characterising the nature of precarious work societies. Precarity itself might emerge here as a social pathology. What comes into view here is the hope for a critical economic sociology that is able to identify those social pathologies that prevent the affected individuals from articulating their experiences of work and find themselves maybe not in a totally administered but a totally precarious work society.