

Introduction

Tomorrow Is Already Here – was the title of Rober Jungk's book published in 1952. That tomorrow has already transformed itself into yesterday and before us we have a tomorrow that began yesterday, today, before yesterday. It can also begin tomorrow. Are we able to see it, at least vaguely, today or does it have to come true, happen and pass for us to be able to say anything about it?

We are used to understanding culture as a process lasting centuries, in which generations following one another take over from their predecessors ideas, knowledge, inventions and lifestyles. They transform all this legacy in accordance with their needs and possibilities, and then transmit it to their successors. And so on, and so forth. "For the past lasts only as the present, while the present is a transformed, updated past and emerging future"¹. With this sentence Stefan Czarnowski ended his essay devoted to the past and the present in culture published in 1938 in a collection entitled *Culture*, in which he masterfully analysed the emergence, durability and changeability of various cultures in the past. However, one essay in this book must be regarded as a failure. I mean here "Powstawanie nowej kultury" ["The emergence of a new culture"] – a somewhat prophetic vision of workers' culture which "could become the culture of the nearest future"². After half a century full of unfortunate attempts to implement this vision, it has proved to be as dead as the term "workers' culture" is empty today.

For a long time scholars studying society and culture have been putting in a lot of effective effort getting to know the legacy which – transformed and modified – is constantly present in successive generations, and even the legacy which has already been forgotten and lost. It is easier for us to point to the sources and roots of the present than the "emerging future". It is easier – though not necessarily more credible – to talk about the past than about the future. Spectacular failures of the so-called scientific social and cultural forecasts teach us to be cautious in formulating such expectations for the humanities and social sciences. But perhaps we remember only forecasts of various disasters we have avoided and promises that have not been fulfilled? And we do not remember the ideas of the future that did come true and, moreover, were used in planning our actions and, above all, made our lives predictable?

¹ S. Czarnowski, *Kultura*, [in:] idem, *Dzieła*, T. 1, Warszawa 1956, p. 121.

² Ibidem, p. 87.

After all, it is difficult not to talk about the future and even more difficult to avoid prognostic statements in everyday life. We trust such statements, if they are based on well-recognised and confirmed regularities and when the temporal horizon of such predictions is not too remote (in the early 1980s, when inflation processes began to intensify also in Poland, Andrzej Mleczko drew a clairvoyant who prophesied: “I can see! “I can see! Eggs costing 100 zlotys!”). It was not difficult to predict that. Yet Mleczko’s clairvoyant lacked imagination to predict the price of eggs in 1991, when it reached 895 zlotys).

It is hard to be satisfied by a relative certainty that something will happen next week or next month. It is easy to give up attempts at predicting what will happen next season, what masterpiece will be written by an eminent composer or what new technology will make our lives happier. On the other hand, we would like to know how this life will look in the nearest or not so near future. What will be important in it and what not, what values will guide our actions, what attitude we will have to nature, transcendence, our neighbours, our community and others. As we watch the present, it seems to us that we can spot the beginnings of changes in it. However, can we recognise and understand them the way we do *ex post*, when, e.g. in the classical background of pre-Romanticism we see the first signs of ideas, aspirations, moods and attitudes developed by mature Romanticism? Previous periods in the history of culture appear to us not as closed, but primarily as relatively coherent, harmonious, regular. Yet the present is liquid, non-coherent, diffused, chaotic, deprived of the overriding principle, directions, role models, regularity. How can we look in it for future shapes, if the present shapes are blurred?

But perhaps it is not about formulating correct predictions for the future of culture, but about asking pertinent questions about possible scenarios, variants and ways of its development? Or about formulating visions of its desired shapes? Although projects of the future – especially those that people attempted to implement – are just as notorious as those wretched forecasts showing only that the future is unpredictable, it is difficult to image the life of a community that would not specify – vaguely or clearly – its goals and aspirations.

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