

FACING A PANDEMIC. INTRODUCTION

The Sars Covid-19 pandemic, with us already for over a year, has embraced the entire globe and affected people, male and female, representing every social category. After all, regardless of which category we talk about, the coronavirus has resulted in societal life (and therefore also the private lives of individuals) proceeding somewhat differently than beforehand.

The pandemic could therefore be defined as a global phenomenon, which—if only because of its universality—deserves the attention of social researchers and humanists. However, the fact that this development has not only resulted in us all experiencing a similar situation, upsetting the hitherto order, but has also placed specific individuals in extremely different predicaments, seems a lot more significant. The pandemic has brought change everywhere, but though for some it has meant a long-cherished moment of putting on the brakes, catching one's breath, escaping the obligations of keeping pace and productivity, for others it has caused a never-before-seen acceleration, absolutely exhausting frontline work fighting the consequences of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. For some the pandemic has brought new sources of income and savings, while leading others to ruin, totally depriving them of the means of making a living. There are those whom it has released from their disliked obligation to meet other people, while it has cut others off from their relations with friends and family which for them are of fundamental significance, and

essential for maintaining good mental health. The pandemic has brought institutions of culture to a standstill, while invigorating online culture; it has left numerous research projects and conferences in suspension, but has facilitated meetings and contacts which previously were not possible; it has brought us together as families, but suspended urban life—or at least its official, out-in-the-open form; it has equipped many with new digital skills, yet deepened the level of exclusion among the elderly, for whom the offline world is the fundamental and sole reality; it has also led us to pay more attention to hygiene and health, but at the same time has caused the deaths of many people due to postponed or cancelled surgery or therapy.

One could give multiple examples of such contraries—after all, they are present on a systematic level, and manifested here for example in the restrictions on mobility among people, but not goods; in borders being closed once again, while international cooperation intensifies in the fight with the pandemic; in the temptation to hand power over to effective but authoritarian governments, and the mass scale of protests erupting recently in various places around the world precisely against monocultural and mono-ideological forms of power; and in the crisis of those forms of the global economy whose essence was mobility (tourism, transport services), alongside the blossoming of those based on producing screen-based experiences (streaming platforms, computer games, social media).

A similar ambiguity is also to be found when we attempt to answer the question regarding what we are actually dealing with: with a *black* or a *grey swan*, as expressed by Ivan Krastev,¹ meaning an unprecedented incident that nobody expected, or a development that was highly probable in the relational, globalised world so full of interdependencies. It is also difficult to define whether the pandemic is a kind of short-lived suspension of the normal functioning of reality, or quite the opposite—the first stage of a *new normal*, the prelude to a profound ecological crisis in which restrictions on movement, isolation, contamination, a multitude of threats to life, and shortages in basic resources such as water, food and shelter will constitute the order of the day. Neither, ultimately, do we know whether the numerous changes that have been brought into our lives by the pandemic and the related lockdown are solely short-term practices in adaptation, or are setting the directions of more enduring transmutations.

This multitude of questions, the ambiguities, and the enormous social anxiety evoked by the pandemic has animated people's reflection. One can hardly be surprised; every situation upsetting our routines, our habits,

¹ Ivan Krastev, *Is It Tomorrow Yet? Paradoxes of the Pandemic*, Penguin Books, London 2020.

challenging what we have taken for granted, works as a breakdown—setting in motion reflection not only regarding what has occurred and how it came about, but also regarding what came before, how the world was constructed, what was working properly in it, and what was not.²

This enlivening of reflection can also be seen in the social sciences and humanities. However, apart from the fact that researchers representing them share the anxiety with the changes brought about by the pandemic, and are striving (as are all other people) to understand them, to define their consequences, they are just as deeply involved in two other practices. Firstly, in the documenting of the transformations borne by the current crisis—so as in the future, and with the distance essential in such a process, to analyse the information thus accumulated and recreate its course; to reconstruct the mechanisms determining our reactions to problems brought by the pandemic, and evaluate steps taken that were meant to cope with its scale and its consequences. Secondly, one can also see a distinct awakening of awareness of the public character of science, and therefore the conviction that the term “public” not only signifies the manner in which it is financed, but also indicates important social obligations. This also explains why practically from the very first days of the pandemic a very large number of research ventures appeared, conceived as a contribution to understanding what we were experiencing, as well as an opportunity for generating knowledge that can be applied, helpful for the diverse bodies managing this crisis. In effect a huge number of research projects emerged concerning various aspects of the pandemic, while also constituting an attempt at recreating Poles’ experience of it.³ A fair number of studies have been conducted into the consequences the pandemic has had for different spheres of life (e.g. education,⁴ culture⁵ or politics⁶). It is also hard not to

² See Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *Quand Je est un autre* (Polish ed.: *Kiedy „Ja” jest innym: dlaczego i jak coś się w nas zmienia*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2013).

³ A regularly updated list is given on the website of the Polish Sociological Association (<https://pts.org.pl/badania>).

⁴ Marek Bożykowski, Albert Izdebski, Mikołaj Jasiński, Joanna Konieczna-Sałamatyn, *Nauczanie w czasie pandemii i perspektywa porotu do normalności*, Warsaw 2021; *Edukacja zdalna w czasie pandemii. Raport z badań. Edycja I i Edycja II*, Centrum Cyfrowe, Warsaw 2020 and 2021.

⁵ *Nowe formy istnienia. Jak zmieniał się teatr w czasie pandemii*—a multi-stage project of the Theatre Institute: (<https://www.institut-teatralny.pl/projekty/nowe-formy-istnienia-jak-zmienial-sie-teatr-w-pa-ndemii>); *Pierwsza do zamknięcia, ostatnia do otwarcia. Kultura w czasie pandemii Covid-19*, Open Eyes Economy, Kraków 2020; *Inna kultura jest możliwa. Koronawirus i przyszłość kultury w Polsce*, Warsaw 2020, and many others.

⁶ Krystyna Skarżyńska, *Polityka i pandemia. Czas sprawdzania (testowania) i rozliczania władzy*, Forum idei, Stefan Batory Foundation, Warsaw 2020; *Działania miast podczas pandemii*, Marek

notice that there have been numerous scientific publications attempting to define what the pandemic is in a social and cultural sense, or to indicate new developments appearing as an effect of the pandemic.⁷

The editors at *Culture & Society* have also decided to join this process of conceptualising and reflecting over the pandemic, resulting not only in this issue of our journal, but also the intention to publish systematically in subsequent issues articles concerning the transformations caused by the current crisis.

This particular issue opens with a record of the discussion organised by the editors of *Culture & Society* and held on 29 September 2020. We invited leading representatives of the social sciences and humanities to take part: Michał Buchowski, Rafał Drozdowski, Kazimierz W. Frieske, Małgorzata Jacyno, Mikołaj Lewicki, Justyna Sarnowska and Magdalena Wieczorkowska. The discussion focused on attempting to determine the nature and status of what we are currently participating in, to define the consequences the pandemic will bring with it, and also to reflect over the kinds of differentiation it is reinforcing, and what new forms of exclusion it is revealing.

In this issue you will find an article by Jowita Radzińska, *A Win for the Middle Class? A Qualitative Study Mapping “Benefits” from the National Quarantine*, tackling the important topic of differentiation in the social consequences of the current crisis, and especially the rather unobvious consequences it is having for the middle class in Poland. Piotr Binder’s paper, *Qualitative Studies on the Social Experiment of Remote Work Forced by the Pandemic*, focuses on how remoteness of work is experienced and thematised by those forced to shift to this mode during the lockdown. The article by Oliwia Chwat, *Social Solidarity During the Pandemic. Analysis of the “Visible Hand” Initiative in the Context of Organisational Processes in Social Movements*, analyses one of the more important social phenomena seen during the pandemic, that of the highly-developed self-help movement. The paper by Katarzyna Sztop-Rutkowska, *Everyday Life in (Post)Pandemic Homes*, is an interesting account of research conducted by the author from the beginning of the pandemic via the website [PandemiaStories.pl](https://pandemiastories.pl), collecting spontaneous accounts from the everyday experiencing of lockdown by

Grochowicz, Piotr Salata-Kochanowski (ed.), Institute of Urban and Regional Development (IRMiR), Warsaw 2020.

⁷ See e.g. the series of articles *European Societies in the Time of the Coronavirus Crisis*, published by *European Societies* (vol. 23, no. 1, 2021), ISA bulletin on the activities of sociologists during the pandemic: (<https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/publications/isa-digital-worlds/global-sociology-and-the-coronavirus/publications-and-call-for-papers> and many others).

Polish men and women. Dagmara Tarasiuk's article, *Strategies Normalising a Previously Unknown Social Problem. Analysis of Memetic Fantasy Themes Concerning Isolation During the Covid-19 Pandemic* is a work in which the author strives to reconstruct online communicative strategies in the face of the pandemic, manifested in an enormous amount of activity in creating and disseminating related memes. The issue also includes an article by Barbara Jabłońska, *Virus as Culture Catalyst? Sociological Reflection on the Example of Musical Practices During the Covid-19 Pandemic*, dedicated to the phenomenon of the intensification of musical practices during lockdown.

May the writings contained in this issue of *Culture & Society* enable a better understanding of the current crisis.

Marek Krajewski

Abstract

The text constitutes an introduction to the monographic journal *Culture & Society* entitled *The Social and Cultural Consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic* (vol. 65, no. 1, 2021). In it, the volume's editor outlines the character of social changes brought about by the pandemic, as well as consequences observed and anticipated, occasionally of extreme variance for different sections of the contemporary Polish society. He rounds off the introduction with a mention of the materials published in this issue of the journal.

key words: Covid-19 pandemic, social change, contemporary Polish society

WOBEC PANDEMII. WPROWADZENIE

Marek Krajewski
(Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu)

Abstrakt

Tekst jest wprowadzeniem do zeszytu mnograficznego „Kultury i Społeczeństwa” pt. „Społeczno-kulturowe skutki pandemii Covid-19” (t. 65, nr 1, 2021). Redaktor tomu zarysowuje w nim charakter zmian społecznych, jakie przyniosła pandemia, a także jej obserwowane i przewidywane skutki, niekiedy skrajnie odmienne dla różnych odłamów współczesnego społeczeństwa polskiego. Na koniec przedstawia publikowane w zeszycie materiały.

słowa kluczowe: pandemia Covid-19, zmiana społeczna, współczesne społeczeństwo polskie