

## Editorial [ENG]

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There is a central question in the theory of history that has permeated discussions about historiographical work since the 19<sup>th</sup> century: what individualizes an event in the flow of events to make it “worthy of history” or, more precisely, a historical object? By radicalizing this issue to its ultimate consequences, we see that what is at stake is the investigation of the meaning of the historical object, that is, what causes something (a fact, an artifact, an action, a document etc.) to appear as an essentially historical element. The historian, theoretician of historical practice, Jörn Rüsen (1938 - ) defines that the “historical constitution of meaning” (*historische Sinnbildung*) is the fundamental task of historical thought. It is important to highlight the notion of “constitution” in the sentence. Constituting history is not the same as instituting history. In other words, what is at stake is not epistemological constructivism that highlights facts in order to establish a causal chain, but a process that recognizes the mediation of human memory as an element capable of recovering meaning. Human memory, of course, is insufficient to reconstruct facts such as they occurred. However, it is not lacking in objectivity, as its narrative raises, based on the requirement of the present, elements that can be understood as historical<sup>1</sup>. In this way, historical consciousness is historical sense. Obviously, we do not intend to exhaust or simplify Rüsen’s thought, we just want to bring up the implication of this way of thinking about history and the meaning of the historical object: the value or the meaning of an experience of the past, mediated by the memory, reconstructs a “history for the present”. The relevance of this position is that the meaning of a historical object

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<sup>1</sup> We cannot go into that topic further. About history as an elaborate form of memory: RÜSEN, J. Como dar sentido ao passado: questões relevantes de meta-história. Trad. Valdei Araujo e Pedro S. P. Caldas. *História da Historiografia: International Journal of Theory and History of Historiography*, v. 2, n. 2, p. 163-209, 2009.

derives, therefore, from the level of connection with the present horizon of human life. Access to the past, and how it can come to the interpreter, depends on the issues that are raised in the present<sup>2</sup>. Historical time is not, therefore, a line that organizes simultaneous or successive events, established according to the causal category. The meaning of the historical object is not something given by itself whose only essential predicate is to refer to what has passed over time. It gains its relevance as a historical object from the requirement of the present experience that recovers what can historically constitute its meaning and project future actions.

What is the purpose of this exhibition in the Dossier Editorial entitled *Pandemic: a year later*? Even with the pandemic still ongoing, for us Brazilians in a dramatic way, there were many voices to indicate that we have been experiencing a historical event. The historian and anthropologist Lilia Schwarcz, for example, as the interview we mention here<sup>3</sup>, believes the pandemic will be the milestone of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for future historical awareness. From what has been explained, a question arises: if the pandemic is still on the horizon of our present experience, which the legitimacy to claim that it will mark what is to come? If an experience of the past gains its historical relevance from questions imposed in a given horizon of the experience, how can we affirm in the present moment in which we experience a pandemic that it is already historically significant and that it will be in the future? We cannot, however, deny this diagnosis: we experience a historical event. The exceptional character of the pandemic event allows us to glimpse its significant mark on historical awareness. We need to understand why something like that appears exceptional.

We experience together – on a global scale – a break from the ordinary experience of time. This break, in turn, significantly suspended our most common daily guidelines,

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<sup>2</sup> See WIKLUND, M. Além da racionalidade instrumental: sentido histórico e racionalidade na teoria da história de Jörn Rüsen. Trad. Pedro Spinola Pereira Caldas. *História da historiografia*, v. 1, n. 1, p. 19-44, 2008. ASSIS, A. *A teoria da história de Jörn Rüsen: uma introdução*. Goiânia: Ed. UFG, 2010. RÜSEN, J. *Razão histórica: os fundamentos da ciência histórica*. Trad. Estevão de Rezende Martins. Brasília: Editora da Universidade de Brasília, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.uol.com.br/universa/reportagens-especiais/coronavirus-100-dias-que-mudaram-o-mundo/#page8>.

our simplest existential projects. As a trauma in our temporal experience, the pandemic we have been experiencing cannot be integrated into a meaningful context. It lacks meaning in our temporal and existential familiar structure, narrating from it and in the midst of it, seems to narrate the absurd. The pandemic seems to extend the time; now is what there is, and existence is suspended in waiting.

If we think about the codependency between the present horizon of human life and the historical possibility – both concerning what may come to make sense as a historical object, as well as to what can significantly guide future actions, as we face a virus of lethal capacity, capable of altering the orientations of our horizon, suspending future projects to our existence, what is threatened is also the historical sense itself. It is, therefore, a radical exceptionality. The historical mark of the pandemic is exactly the experience of the suspension of the sense of the historical narrative because it is rather the suspension of the experience of time in our most ordinary life. After all, in this extended present that we experience: What to recover? How to look forward to the future?

From what was exposed another question arises out: how to elaborate this trauma? Unlike optimistic predictions – based much more on desires than on evidence – the pandemic has so far not led us to any possibility of appropriating ourselves, time, or history, but in many moments, it has deepened an impoverished daily life, marked above all by the impersonal treatment of death. As the song by the Brazilian songwriter Criolo says: “Let's go today's activities to wash the glasses, count the bodies”<sup>4</sup>. In short, the exceptionality of trauma without elaboration.

We are not questioning the necessary actions to contain the pandemic<sup>5</sup>, the question that motivates us is the following one: in the face of the reality of the pandemic, in the face of what was and still needs to be done – for example, social distance, hygiene

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<sup>4</sup> CRIOLO. Lion Man (Album *Nó Na orelha*). São Paulo: Oloko Records, 2011 (3:25).

<sup>5</sup> We are not in any way attached to positions like those of Agamben, more committed to its own conceptual framework than to phenomena. *Reflexões sobre a peste: ensaios em tempos de pandemia*. Tradução de Isabella Marcatti e de Luisa Rabolini. São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2020.

measures etc. – why cannot we think of another world than that of pre-pandemic? Why what we have been round and round in this waiting is only the desire to return to “normality”?<sup>6</sup> Why do we still conceive, or even desire, ways of life that generated in our present lethargy, helplessness, and death (as numerical data) as the only life possibilities different from the pandemic? Perhaps these are important questions.

It seems to us legitimate to conceive that the pandemic already has its significant mark on historical consciousness due to its radically exceptional trait. Whether the pandemic will mark the end of the twentieth century for future historical consciousness, we may not know exactly. But if our only way out and the only possible wish in the midst of the wait we are experiencing is the return to pre-pandemic living conditions, we can say: when the past is the only possibility of the present, the future has already gone.

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<sup>6</sup> We can be asked about the role of scientists, health professionals, and professionals of essential services, whose role was and still is of intense work. We can also be asked about the lives lost. Our point is not contrary to the recognition of the professionals involved. And we are in solidarity with families that have lost beloved ones. What we question here is exactly a “normality” that is not able to recognize the urgency of the alerts of specialists and researchers about global health crisis. Governments hostage to the economy and financial speculation that ignore expert warnings about impending pandemic risks, global warming, and the depletion of natural resources, and still promote the false dichotomy between economy x health. As an example of alert and solutions, we can quote the report of Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB) September 2019, available at [https://apps.who.int/gpmb/annual\\_report.html](https://apps.who.int/gpmb/annual_report.html).