

Review of: "Historical Semiotics"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I highly commend the author's attempt to provide a valid alternative of studying, writing, and teaching history through historical semiotics. This essay enhances the legitimacy of a scientifically driven study of history through a more nuanced understanding of semiotics that constitutes the power of cognition, sign systems, language systems, theory-based interpretation, and mental representations for which metadiscursive vocabulary such as sign, text, code, encoding, decoding, language, and medium (Craig, 1999) are considered vital in interpreting texts, and in writing and teaching history characterized by integrity, truthfulness and trustworthiness.

I'm no historian. I'm an academic, but I learn, understand and reflect on my country's history through reading published works, while being deeply mindful of oral narratives that permeate those communities I grew up with, and I have had interactions with. My comments or reactions here are designed to expand the article (or conversation, I must say) surrounding historical semiotics in ways that would enable educators both in basic education and in tertiary education to capture insights beneficial to teaching history to children, teenagers and young adults with integrity, truthfulness, and trustworthiness. My comments generally convey practical and/or pedagogical dimensions, less on abstraction.

1. The sophistication and precision, both in language and writing of this essay, would have broadly appealed historians' and social scientists' reason and emotions. My concern, however, is its readability and comprehensibility to general, ordinary readers. I understand that the target audience of this intellectual work are historians, in which, with exposure, intellectual capacity and practice, have acquired the necessary competency to fathom texts such as this; however, since the concern about how history must be taught in schools has been advanced in this essay (for which teachers emerge as target audience), it might be worthwhile to rethink/reconsider audience groups or demographics and to endeavor towards transforming this highly intellectual work into another article for which thousands of teachers in basic education in many parts of the world can understand in their own capacity, thereby giving them the impetus, motivation and inspiration to do the right thing (based on informed judgment) in teaching history in their classrooms.
2. Influenced by Peirce and Craig, my understanding of semiotics is that any phenomenon under study, using semiotics as a lens, is theorized as *intersubjective mediation by signs*. Intersubjectivity is informed by researchers' lived experiences, deep reflections on experience, differences, context, culture, and positionality which have bearing in the way they interpret signs allowing them to pin down the objects that these signs signify. Intersubjective mediation by signs happens when researchers share a system of signs, meanings, vocabulary and language structures to bridge the gap between subjective viewpoints (Craig, 1999) and therefore safeguard against miscommunication. Also, as researchers deeply immerse into cultural or historical artefacts in an attempt to understand them, they constantly revisit and reflect on their experiences, and interrogate their interpretations to pursue a more nuanced understanding

of an object of study, a process called *reflexivity*. I'm just wondering if, in an attempt to make further revision or expansion of this essay, the author would give a space and place for intersubjectivity and reflexivity in explaining historical semiotics, because, in my view, these concepts and the ways they are understood are different and more nuanced compared to the way we view intuition and common sense (or, I may be wrong).

3. This essay offers tremendous opportunities for historians to seriously take a more perilous but deeply rewarding journey of precise sign-object interpretation using scientific discursive metalanguage, mental models, cognition, and theory-based approaches for which an historical outcome (e.g., a book chapter on history) is characterized by scientific integrity, truthfulness and reasoned judgment. However, when ordinary people read history, in which well-researched, well-documented historical artefacts emerge as textual signs that they endeavor to understand, they tend to be jolted by sophisticated language and style, and they tend to be more inclined to believe in their *own opinions* deeply entrenched in their minds. This can potentially create a cognitive bias especially in a world where distrust in formerly respectable sources of factual information constantly grows, along with the increasing relative volume and resulting influence of personal opinions over facts (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018), the latter being the outcome of careful, precise and thorough data capture. Historical semiotics might help in tracing and capturing textual artefacts as signs that would help sustain the very core of a nation's history, but in the eyes of ordinary individuals (e.g., ordinary students and teachers in public schools), historical semiotics driven by scientific inquiry, precision in style and sophistication in writing might have lesser impact on them (the general student and teacher population). In an attempt to further expand this intellectual work, I am thrilled if the author integrates the role and function of compelling stories in explaining historical semiotics. From a pedagogical perspective, it might be rewarding to explore how stories or narratives can attract students' attention and sustain engagement in studying history. Stories that profoundly resonate with the realities of the human condition and those that appeal to the very core of their emotions yet accurately depict historical artefacts/data as textual signs could make a stronger impact in students' thinking and behavior.

I have so much respect to the writer who spent time and energy theorizing and advancing the scholarship of historical semiotics. The impact it makes can multiply a hundredfold as we all envision to share or teach history as an outcome of rigor, integrity, truth, justice and fairness.