

Review of: "Historical Semiotics"

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Grigori Khislavski's essay aims to open up historical semiotics for historical science or education. He begins with a description of the problem of German history education, noting its loss of importance in comparison to social studies. Furthermore, he emphasizes a contradiction between the politically intended public remembrance of National Socialism and the way students deal with the topic, which is due to the fact that hardly any contemporary witnesses are still alive. As a theoretical solution, he proposes a framework of historical semiotics that could be used by historians in the context of the Children's University, for example, to enter into a conversation about National Socialism on an abstract level. Khislavski then explains the context of historical semiotics and problematizes the interpretation of sources as decoding signs. Then, on the basis of evolutionary theory, he clarifies that signs can be "read" on the ontological, epistemological, and communicative levels, if one abandons positivism and deals with the fallibilist and epistemology of reality in the sense of critical rationalism. This would require criteria to decode the multidimensionality of signs in historical context and to enable a "common sense". On this basis, a theory-based language is needed, which is why a hermeneutic approach based on sources alone is not sufficient. Historiographical theorizing - as one could interpret the author (section 4) - is hardly possible without historical semiotics, because historical science is confronted with everyday phenomena that must be translated into scientific language and communicated to the everyday language of students in order to enable well-founded knowledge. The actions of people in the past were also based on signs, which were coded and decoded in order to mentally represent realities. Consequently, historical research and education can only be conceived as a process of encoding and decoding past signs by means of language, the result of which must be falsified on the basis of linguistic criteria. The linguistic representations of historians (and students?) served as filters in this process and had to be consciously related to the encoding and decoding process of historical signs, e.g., through hypotheses. In conclusion, Khislavski argues that historical science - and perhaps (?) history education - should shake off the hermeneutic approach of the 19th century in order to see itself as a science to which historical semiotics can contribute.

Overall, the author makes an interesting trans-disciplinary proposal to address the challenges of historical epistemology (absence of the object of cognition, otherness of the past, relation between theoretical deduction and source- or sign-based induction) and education (linkage between past signs/mental representations, historiographic signs/representations/theories, and signs/preconceptions/daily language of students and various addressees). However, a few things are unclear to me: 1. Who is the target audience of the article? The introduction suggests that it is aimed at history educators or didacticians, the conclusion seems to be aimed more at historians. 2. Can the description of the initial situation in the introduction be better substantiated? The study by Knothe & Broll (2019) on dealing with National Socialism is neither representative (For what? All of Germany, Bavaria? As a qualitative study?) nor does the author

provide references on how students deal with National Socialism. In fact, there are numerous studies from German-speaking history didactics that should be consulted in order to specify the description of the state (e.g., Zültsdorf-Kersting, 2007; Köster, 2013, Yildirim, 2018). 3. Can historical science really be described as theory-less and historians implicitly as objectivist hermeneutics, aiming only at criterionless reconstruction based on taste? The debate about the scientific character of history is as old as the historiography itself and has involved historicist hermeneutics (e.g., Droysen), narrativists (e.g., Danto), skeptics (e.g., White, Munslow), realists (e.g., Lorenz), and narrative constructivists (e.g., Rüsen, Daniel). In addition, the latter authors in particular have reflected intensively on language-based criteria of reasonable narratives - also with regard to the theory problem of historical science. 4) Can it be said, moreover, that history education or didactics does not sufficiently consider the problem of "translation" between past reality and language, historiographical assumptions, and language, as well as the language etc. of students? In my view, the discussion of this connection runs through the history of the discipline. Starting with Friedrich Lucas' "Giessen School", through the British CHATA project (e.g., Dennis Shemilt), to language-sensitive contemporary reflections (e.g., Saskia Handro) or interventions (e.g., Susan De La Paz). This brings me back to my initial question: who should use the theory outlined here and for what purpose? I would suggest sharpening the target audience and "selling" the theory in relation to the target audience's approaches to increase the likelihood of acceptance and consideration! Otherwise, there is a risk that Khislavski's interesting approach will find few listeners or be rejected.