

To review a book whose explicit purpose is .. "a return to the semiotics and pragmatism of Charles Sanders Pierce, as well as a redevelopment of social theory in that perspective, [and] to arrive at an integrative, social-semiotic theory of mass communication." (Chapter 1), is at best a stimulating task and as challenging as Jensen's erudite attempt.

Semiotike for John Locke¹ (1690) was a kind of logic and, "The consideration then of ideas and words as the great instruments of knowledge, makes no despicable part of their contemplation who would take a review of human knowledge in the whole extent of it." And Pierce in his classic essay on 'How to make our ideas clear'², makes this telling note that, "Whoever has looked into a modern treatise on Logic of the common sort, will doubtless remember the two distinctions between clear and obscure conceptions, and between distinct and confused conceptions ... [and], are generally reckoned by logicians as among the gems of their doctrine". Jensen's attempt is both a contemplation in Lockeian terms and a very erudite attempt at the building of a distinct 'conception' in Piercean terms.

The book has been divided into three parts, the first being "The Social sources of semiotics", the second "Communication Theory: First order semiotics" and the third being a "Theory of science; second order semiotics" with a total of 11 chapters and extensive explanatory notes and a bibliography that literally reads like a who's who in Semiology, Sociology, Mass communication as well as several 'related disciplines'.

It is an interesting coincidence (or was that thought off) the importance of the triads in this book, for instance Pircean semiotics (or the pragmatism of Jensen) has three definite components, "... the triad of Emotional, Energetic, and Logical Interpretants suggests how Piercian semiotics may support a social science of signs and action..." (chapter 4), the Structure of the society that he advocates is also triadic and as we proceed we find that Pierce himself had a strong inclination to the number three.

Jensen's introductory treatment of the subject is interesting and in the process of building up on the premise, he calls for a more differentiated theory of signs to assess communication and its impact on audiences, while summarizing that .."postmodernist culture and post stucturalist science inherit the Logos tradition upside down." (Chapter 1).

¹ Locke, John. An essay concerning Human unsterstanding (1690) (full test Virginia Tech) On Line (Internet)).
² Pierce, Charles, S. How to make our ideas clear, (Popular Science Monthly 12, January 1878, pp 286-302 On line (Internet)).
Chapter 1 is a succinct overview and an introduction to the wide field that has to be included, the theoretical basis for their inclusion, the Piercian view and the reasons for such a view being able to hold together and integrate a dynamic semiotic process of society and action, a valid theory of communication and the social uses of meaning. A brief on what to expect from the chapters to follow gives the reader a reasonable idea of the contents, and also the premises on which the chapters are structured. The differentiation of chapters by headings and sections is also a very helpful device and is used throughout the book.

The evolution of the 'word to text', and, 'from text to trace' deals essentially with the influence engendered by the logos tradition and at the core of this 'discourse' is the subject-object theory that have influenced every aspect of intellectual life in the West - a concept of the "constructive-developmental" approach to human experience, and the growth and transformation of how meaning is constructed.

The three distinct features of Jensen's pragmatism viz. the first being that the Piercean Semiosis is a continuous process of signification, and secondly, the performative aspect i.e. 'a predisposition to act' is both contextual, purposeful, and initiating further process of semiosis, and the third being difference in the semiological tradition which focuses on the discursive differences rather than the interpretative or the social. These three aspects taken together make up the new Agenda.

This chapter lays the basis to the essential premise of pragmatism as well as the limitations of structuralism and post structuralism, Piercian Pragmatism in Jensens opinion would teach us to avoid the rearviewmirrorism, and look beyond the multiple mirrors of postmodernism.

It is interesting to note here that Pierce himself was not very much in favour of this term (Pragmaticism as it was initially coined) and concept. Jensen also admits this, and it is commendable that in the true tradition of an objective researcher, he has appropriated that part which would configure with his proposition. This is also evident in other areas, wherein he has quoted several others, more, as a counterpoint to his own development of the premise. (A Saussurean device perhaps).

Admitting Pierce's pragmatism (world view) as limited by his own predilection, Chapter 2 is still a Piercean development in respect to the development of a Theory of Communication, or first order of semiotics, and, as a theory of science, or second order semiotics.

Chapter 2 develops Piercean pragmatism and sets the agenda for Social semiotics. In tracing the appearance, disappearance and the resurgence of pragmatism, Jensen's admiration for Pierce as a falibilist and Piercean pragmatism is very clear.

In tracing the history of signs in Western Philosophy and science, and notwithstanding the grip of the Logos tradition, the understanding of Signs as conditions of 'perception, interpretation, dialogue and action' recur.

This recurrence is evident not only in the Piercean emphasis on Interpretants and the interpretive communities, but in scholars and practitioners like Hippocrates, Aristotle, and St. Augustine (amongst the ancient influential thinkers in fields as diverse as medicine, philosophy and theology).
Aristotle is credited with the identification of the three key constituents of epistemology viz. Objects or things, mental impressions and their expression, and thus fomenting a dichotomy between signs and the reality that they represent, and which has been the dominant characteristic and basis of western philosophy for centuries. An interesting parallel that Jensen draws is the implication of St. Augustine's explicit typology of natural and phenomenological signs, with its implication to semiosis.

This rather long section also traces the origins of Scientific cognition via Locke, the interpretation of scientific signs and 'sense data', the reductionism versus formal logic, and the genesis of the modern theory of science.

The eventual 'rescue' of Modern science and philosophy by Kant, by reemphasizing the dominance of Language (which in any case was central to most philosophy), and its essential influence on Pierce who subsequently builds upon his own reflections to arrive at Semiotics and its importance to the understanding of the nature of knowledge and everything that it represents including Science.

Pierce's definition of semiosis. (Triadic semiosis) bases all thinking, perception and interaction with reality, as mediated by signs. The illustration of the triadic model and 'infinite semiosis', its implications for the epistemology that transcends the innate dichotomies and the ontological assumptions (three again) is cogently explained.

However, the section on Interpretants and the interpretive communities appeared to be going 'every which way'. The juxtaposing of the phenomenal categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness with the modern conception of different Interpretants in the process of communication and analysis brought in various concepts and to my mind, a loosing of the main thread.

Chapter 2 is an important chapter, wherein the Piercean pragmatism is explained via the pragmatic maxim and its implications 'to the consequences on thought experiments'.

The further implication, as a consequence of this maxim is that, it is only at the conceptual and theoretical level, through a process of semiosis and involving a community of inquires, that enables or permits, the apprehension of the 'effects' of reality on human experience (p. 27).

The essential premise of pragmatism as explicated is practicality, and the origin of belief and its intimate connection with habit. The various categories of differences viz. discursive, interpretive and social is also delineated with its relation to, and implications in the process of communication, and its consequent contribution to the cultural practices as well as the overall structuration of the Society.

This chapter then leads to the essential premise of the book, and this section is aptly titled 'Toward semiotics'. Here the interdisciplinary character of pragmatism and the elasticity of semiotics with its ability to influence various schools whether in the social sciences or humanities, film theory or mass communication research or in the development of theory is enumerated.

Jensen has several leading scholars of the twentieth century sharing this section with its essential undercurrent of allegiance and loyalty (which is the common thread throughout the book) to Pierce and
the important role of the pragmatic School and its influence on these Scholars. They range from Jakobson, Chomsky, Rosenthal, Derrida, Dewey et al.

In the "Meaningful society: Recontextualizing Social Sciences", chapter 3 and end of section 1, Jensen uses Rorty's usage of the term Recontextualization to refer to the process of scientific inquiry as a special form of meaning production.

This chapter develops the theory of Society, at the same time highlighting the inability of several theories (of Barthes, Levi Strauss) to integrate the social scientific and the humanistic study of Society, in the analysis of semiosis, as discursive processes in social practices.

This chapter has also analyzed and illustrated the Structuration theory while highlighting the middle range theories as the one that .. "emphasizes the interrelations between overarching, macro structures and distributed, micro-processes". The emphasis as always is on the link with Pragmatism. The fact is that the term middle range itself suggests pragmatism.

It is in the development of three models that Jensen's integrative attempts come to a focus, and quite explicitly reveals the interconnectedness between the epistemological focus in terms of the Piercean Semiotics and the concepts of meaning.

This is also the first time in the development of the book that such an explicit relationship between Societal structures, Semiosis and the process of Mass communication is expressed and explained in a precise unambiguous manner and without recourse to frequent supportive references. This then is the core of the book and the raison de etre of the premise.

Section 2, has five chapters and include 'A new theory of mass communication and the empirical analyses of the constituents of social semiotics'.

An interesting construct in the development of the new theory of mass communication has been the concept of time-in and time-out cultures, and the basis being the look at culture as a 'humanistic' process and as specific products of the human spirit. For Jensen the duality of cultures is the key to mass communication theory.

Time-in culture is that aspect of semiosis which is representational and performative, i.e., enabling and promoting other social actions, and time-out culture places 'reality on an explicit agenda as an object of reflexivity...providing... a social, existential or religious perspective.' (p. 57-58)

This interrelatedness of these constitutive aspects, and not separate events, lead to, "The theory of Social semiotics thus defines mass communication as an institution producing and circulating meaning in society through the interrelated practices of time-in and time-out culture." (Pg 58)

Habermas' theoretical model has been effectively interpreted and illustrated to differentiate the genre's, and also the uses by the audience, and the private/public spheres. The consequences of this interaction between mass media and the audience to the semiotic processes and cultural practices develops into areas for research.
In Europe the trend towards A-day-in-the-life, or everyday practices as a tangible supplement in and to Qualitative research, is gaining increasing adherents and diverse fields, and Jensen's emphasis on strong methodological terms (including the earlier mentioned) for research together with the Triadization of culture, social institutions and the everyday practices is elaborated in the analysis of various constituents (contextual, audience, media and analytical) under the ambit of The Methodological constituents of Reception Analyses. (p. 69)

This section calls for closer reading and does form (all the constituent sections in this chapter taken together) a strong theoretical and methodological base for research. The approach is taken up, as the contextual constituents of Social semiotics using the news media, the democratization of knowledge (information) and in particular, ".. the decoding of the television news genre as a resource for political and other social action." (chapter 5).

The ambivalence in the importance accorded to news by respondents and producers are emphasized with the need for a particular form of media and visual literacy to make a substantive (meaningful) impact and, thus promote participation in the political process which as Jensen observes is carried largely in and through the mass media and Television in particular.

Though, in the ultimate analysis it appears that "... most of the things in news are not things that I think are important to me." (p. 90). This succinctly sums up Chapter 5.

In chapter 6 the audience forms the constituent, and audience interests, to include gratification's sought, age, medium and using the analytical constituent of an encounter session - 'workshops on the future', also includes a suggestion, ".. that media reception be analyzed with specific reference to the contexts of social action embedding mass media." (p. 91).

The underlying issue of this chapter is the understanding of mass media audiences and the difficulty in categorizing notwithstanding several theories and 'Methodologies for studying audience interpretive repertoires, (communities) and interests'.

In conclusion (of the workshop methodology, based in an American setting and consisting of viewers among different age groups, and their perceptions) confirmed amongst other findings the choice of viewing (contents) varying with the ages, and the persuasiveness of television as a fact of everyday lives.

The implications gleaned from the findings make it abundantly clear that the users grasp and reach of the uses of mass communication cannot be subsumed by the issues confronting media professionals.

An interesting finding is that "The audience conception of media is likely to affect the social uses and effects of media content in ways that are not well understood" (p. 106). Commenting on the interactive and participative nature of the workshop approach, and the futuristic orientation this engenders (in terms of the evaluative and other judgmental aspects provided by the audience), is according to Jensen, a proof of the practical aspect of Pragmatism and the positive approval of reasoning in human action.
In Chapter 7, the media constituents of flow, and the continuous experiencing of inter-related sequences as, ".. a single dimension and in a single operation" (p. 109), and the implications thereof, specifically in the context of American commercial television and its reception forms the contents of this chapter.

The differentiation of flows into a channel flow, viewer flow and a super-flow, each of these distinctions having characteristics that range from viewing habits of the audience, to choice, and, to the media-producers induced orientation to program segments and sequences.

This is developed into a framework, for study that highlighted the need for hard data vis a vis the reception processes and ".. for the comparative analysis of audience and media discourses" (p. 111).

In summing up chapter 7, Jensen's concern needs to be mentioned. All structural factors, (in his considered opinion) be they, specific social organizations, or concepts like super themes, and intertextuality, does orients audiences reflexivity, notwithstanding research that projects audience autonomy.

This in turn he argues necessitates qualitative evaluation of the offerings in total, from the standpoint of super-flow, channel and the viewer flows of the various television producing and disseminating institutions. However, as Steven S. Wildman, in The Economics of Audiencemaking, maintains that Media flows are constructions of the audience in the sense that there is definite relation between media flows and audience composition.3

The Discourses of research: Analytical constituents of semiotic research, (chapter 8) is truly, a well structured integrative exercise, balancing on the one hand the inadequacy of the collection and interpreting data procedures and on the other suggesting a linguistic discourse analysis as a way out of the endless debates about the various research procedures. (Another Pragmatic emphasis.)

A remarkable piece of pragmatic enterprise is his comment that, ".. empirical research needs to consider multiple discourses with a bearing on media reception, while assessing their explanatory value with explicit reference to the methodological constituents of research" (p. 125).

Thus a complementarity between methodological approaches and analytical procedures should effectively tackle those gray areas, (epistemological doodling, in Jensen's term), considering that, approaches and findings are always interrelated, and that accepting the basic premise that different signs inform different aspects of reality.

The last section begins with the Epistemology of communication and emphasizes the importance of Logic in the familiar terms of Deduction and Induction and introducing Abduction as a natural complement to/of, the Piercean sign and his triadic conception of reality (Chapter 9, pg. 148-149).

Beginning with the historical and innate divide between the natural scientific and the humanistic apprehension of science as affecting the field of Communications, a Peircean pragmatic theory of science, a new paradigm - the third, ".. that may accommodate the understanding of scientific semiosis

as a form of social actions”, is suggested as a means of ‘a coming together’ of the various interdisciplinary debates.

Noting that Abduction is an independent and distinctive form of inferencing and this is what distinguishes the Piercean framework, from lets say, the formal sciences with its emphasis on logic and mathematics and deductive leanings, and the inductive orientation of the empirical sciences (p. 150).

Abduction in practice, is illustrated with three examples from reception studies, the first being Janice Radways (1984) empirical reception analysis study, the second being James Lull's study of television viewing and family communication and the third is the author's own study of the Danish viewers reception of television news.

These three examples covered the themes of Reading, social uses of television and the Super themes of news reception, and the essential conclusion has been that Abduction permits focus within the Qualitative Research framework and valid inferencing, which also permits a variety of mergers of constituent findings without affecting the essential validity or the general inference. (Generalizations).

"The Ontology of Communication: Another guess at the riddle" (Chapter 10) is a candid account of the essential problems that inevitably confront interdisciplinary research, and more so when attempts to locate Piercean semiotics, cognitive research and some of its recent findings, and semiotic network, in and for a general theory of communication. This is the integrative area and as Jensen comments in a different context, "..it (integrative research) walks a fine line between common sense and analogies pressed too far" (p. 173).

In the section 'Two models of semiosis', Connectionism with its basis in Cognitive science and, Piercean semiotics (as distinct from that developed by Jakobson with its assumption of meaning resulting from the configuring of selection and combination) with its emphasis on, meaning being decided by pragmatism, is the core of this section.

This section is also made interesting with the explication of the network and relational semiotics (p. 164-166) and Umberto Eco's implications of relational semiotics, metonymic structuration and unlimited semiosis.

Semiotic and cognitive networks are taken as ontological models ".. demonstrating the internal structure of Interpretants in human communication." And further illustrating the point ".. that signs are the media through which we come to know what we can justify saying what we know" (p. 168-169).

The next section deals with Pierce's formal ontology and the neat fit with the triadic category and principles of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness forms an elaborate schema that takes the sign and their interface with Interpretants, the objects and the issues related to reductionism and the network model implying ".. a new configuration of meaning units that lend themselves to infinite combination".

René Thom's approach to semiotics is offered as an illustration of an 'ambiguous, uninformative [and] redundant' attempt to integrate an interdisciplinary categories of research. This reviewer found Jensen's conclusion regarding Thom's approach as unwarranted and needlessly pejorative (p. 173).
In the section 'Visual communication: Toward a typology of signs', The existence of two registers of semiosis and the difficulty in categorizing Analogical and Propositional representations under symbolic or distributed representation and in the context of the study of the essentially visual nature of film, television and the current pervasiveness of the Computer media ".. research on mental representation raises critical issues". (p. 175)

Commenting on the various schools of theories that divides the Visual Communication Research camps and maintaining the current importance of the audio visual media in terms of its pervasive use and likely impact, and also considering that, "The evidence ..(in visual communication research) suggests that ..studies are not served by ..the linguistic model or Pierce's formal taxonomies of possible signs." (p. 179)

The final chapter 11 directs Jensen's critical guns at Rorty and Habermas, with the key issue being the shifting of the discourse from theoretical analysis to the genre of cultural criticism, and the summing up of, "... a pragmatic perspective on the classic conception of the mass media as a public sphere ... a cultural forum, or an institution-to-think-with...".

This reviewer found that the critical essays on Rorty and Habermas focusing on what it did not do for Piercean pragmatism and wondered at its need, however, the section "The end of Communication" with its implicit orientation to future Research from the end-of-communication perspective, and the perspective of 'communication rights' is both a prescription and an indicator of the need to establish conditions that would promote social transformation.

In conclusion, while drawing on the meaning (historically and Socio culturally) of surplus as a value (with Economic and Marxian and production/consumption connotations) and to introduce "... surplus meaning to characterize certain features of contemporary meaning production ..", the promise of the cross disciplinary trend becomes visible .

In Jensen's schema surplus meaning would influence Social action and transformation since it ".. is premised on ... reality principles .. and principles of material production." (p. 194).

Summing up: (Reviewers note):

The premise and its attempt is an ambitious task in the sense of 'making meaning' (no pun intended) of a wide range of thinkers from Aristotle to Witgenstein and at the same time maintain the essential premise and the basis of the theory that characterizes the Book "The Social Semiotics of Mass communication" not only requires the kind of scholarly approach that Jensen reflects but also his depth and sweep to provoke and stimulate a science that seem to attract an increasingly large number of adherents and proponents. In that sense Semiology itself is an interdisciplinary.

The tendency to bring in a host of names while indicative of the range and the implicit agreement of the premise, is a device that distracts and at its worst make the reader meander in an attempt to locate the specific scholars work mentally. (I am referring to the several references in one paragraph or in one sentence and the several different authors in the same section.)
The issue of gender apprehension of reality and meaning production and significance, does not find mention at all, and the only time gender is referred to is the section on visual communication (chapter 10) and in the Public sphere model (chapter 4).

The development of Para Social relationship (especially in the dominant visual media and Computer mediated communications) is a development that can affect meaning production and apprehension of reality. This is an area of concern as well as future Research.

The emphasis on Western and Occidental only approach, limits the development of the Interdisciplinary premise, and the absence of cross cultural (in the true sense, in the true anthropological sense) references also construes a kind of exclusivism. This reviewer finds in the works of Carlos Castaneda and J. Krishnamurti - for instance- certain examples of reality apprehending and meaning construing to be very informative and illustrative.

While this reviewer is not in complete agreement with Roland Barthes's viewpoint in regard to the reader and reading, in conclusion this sums up.. "... The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author".