



Participatory Sense-Making:

Between embodied and narrative alternatives to mindreading

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What would happen if, in the investigation of social cognition, instead of focusing on individual capacities, we concentrated on the interaction process? The first question that comes to mind then is: What is the interaction process? In De Jaegher and Di Paolo (2007), we have characterised the interaction process using the concepts of coordination and autonomy. The interaction process is made up of the coordination of movements and utterances that interaction partners do (coordination being a variable and measurable phenomenon). Furthermore, we see each unfolding interaction/coordination process as taking on a form of autonomy. I explain both these aspects. Taken together with the role of the individuals engaged in the interaction process, these features allow us to reformulate the question of how social cognition works. Social cognition, in our view, becomes a matter of how meaning is generated and transformed in the interplay between the unfolding interaction process and the individuals engaged in it. Individuals are, a lot of their time, engaged in sense-making: the active, meaning- and value-generating engagement with their world. In social situations, they participate in each other's sense-making. Participatory sense-making can take on various forms, some of which I detail in the presentation.

Participatory sense-making as an approach to social cognition goes further than many embodied approaches in that it goes beyond a near exclusive focus on individual capacities and takes very seriously the interaction process. The prevalent focus on individual capacities, I think, leaves to the imagination a large part of the explanation of what goes on in social understanding. For instance, we can only wonder how it is that, sometimes, two people who have no bad intentions towards each other at the start of an encounter together, nevertheless end up fighting. Or how your view on a shared event can change subtly in interaction with another who takes a different perspective on it than you. The participatory sense-making can explain such phenomena. From this perspective, if there is time, I will generate and discuss some examples of how narrative interpersonal understanding might take place in interaction.

