**Symbolic Interaction and Perspective-Taking**

Although there is agreement in the literature across various disciplines regarding that perspective-taking plays a role in social understanding and the development of self, there is wide dissensus over what that role consists in; particularly over whether the activity is primarily of a mental or social-pragmatic nature and how constitutive it is in development, that is, whether it is a secondary development following a basic understanding of self and other or foundational. Cognitive-neuroscientific branches of social and developmental psychology, in particular current social cognition theories such as theory of mind-theory and simulation-theory, place the focus on the individual and offer representationalist accounts of self-reflection and social understanding, whereas interactionist, participatory and lately phenomenological theories of social understanding prioritize interpersonal interaction and argue for a basic, immediate understanding of others in interaction. Cognitivist accounts downplay the constitutive role as well as the situated context of social interaction due to the very model they operate through, which places the source of meaning within the individual mind. In effect, they conceive social cognition as a fundamentally epistemic and not a pragmatic matter. The participatory and interactionist accounts as well as their phenomenological variants on the other hand acknowledge interaction as the locus of meaning-making, but overestimate the sub-symbolical embodied processes that facilitate interpersonal communication while underestimating symbolical mediation. The first perspective assumes an experiential gap between minds so wide that there is no intersubjective ground for perspective-taking. The second gives coordinated embodied action or shared experience so central a position that difference and mediation, which are inalienable aspects of perspective-taking in social interaction, play only a secondary and subsequent role. What is central to perspective-taking and its development but missing in either approach is symbolically mediated social interaction. Social-relational theories dating back the works of Lev Vygotsky and George Herbert Mead do not assume a representation-interaction divide and still offer valuable insight into how perspective-taking emerges and develops through symbolic activity within a social context. The present work follows this line of theorization and offers a semiotic-pragmatic account of the development of social perspectives. It argues

in two interconnected theses that understanding of self and others depends for its possibility and development on symbolically mediated social interaction.

It asserts that, firstly, perspective-taking is primarily social-relational and secondarily individual and cognitive. Perspectives are first differentiated, assumed, and coordinated within social interaction and through pragmatic involvement with a socially mediated environment, and later the social operation is internalized and transformed into the cognitive function of perspective-taking. Secondly, the development of the capacity for perspective-taking goes hand in hand with and is essentially related to the development of the capacity for sign-use. It concludes that through the course of development it is through social interaction that higher order sign-relations, or symbolic activity come about, which in turn opens up further levels of social meaning and hence deepens and enriches intersubjective processes.