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Author

Kurtz, Kenneth

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Poetry improvisation as problem-solving in distributed cognitive systems

Pedro Atã & João Queiroz

Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora (UFJF)

Abstract: Artifacts and problems co-determine one another in a continuous process. If externalist cognition is described merely as the efficient use of artifacts to solve problems, we lose sight of the mediating process through which artifacts and problems are reciprocally constituted. Repente, a Brazilian tradition of improvised oral poetry, illustrates this dynamic particularly well. Poet-singers must solve problems under multiple constraints while mastering semiotic artifacts such as versification patterns, melodic structures, and musical instruments. What is produced through this process? Our proposal is that improvisation generates regularities. In this framework, what stands at the center of distributed cognition is neither an isolated agent nor a discrete task, but a rule for producing regularities. This rule triadically mediates between signs (artifacts) and problems (objects), generating regular effects (interpretants). The result is a distributed cognitive system grounded in the stabilization and transformation of semiotic habits.