ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA | DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

SeRiC
FILO
Seminari delle Ricerche in Corso

SeRiC - Seminari delle Ricerche in Corso 2025/2026

SELECTION-BASED STRATEGIES IN COGNITIVE THEORISING AND THEIR SOCIAL DIMENSION

16/02/2026 h 15:00/17:00
Sala Mondolfo, via Zamboni 38

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Several theories account for cognitive phenomena by appealing to selection-based explanations where an initial state of high complexity, indeterminacy, or cognitive load is processed via the foregrounding of elements deemed relevant and, correspondingly, the backgrounding of remaining ones. This is visible, for instance, in classic cognitivist theories of attention that describe it as a type of filter, in computational models of language that seek to arrive at the most likely semantic connections and discard all other ones, or in Ecological Psychology's account of how organisms learn to identify among all perceptual information received what is invariant and, therefore, most ecologically relevant. While theories of cognitivist background appeal to selection in explaining specific cognitive skills, so-called radically embodied approaches posit selection as pervasive to cognition. This difference can be traced back to the philosophical roots of each approach, reaching back at least to 19th-century disputes. Remarkably under-explored among both types of theory, though, is the role social environments play in selective processes. In this work, social mechanisms are presented which operate on cognition via 1) selection of stimuli to which members of a community are exposed, 2) augmentation and diminution of the perceived salience of said stimuli, and 3) creation and specification of their meaning. These three basic mechanisms, which can all be described in terms of selection, are pervasive in human worlds and should be taken into account when explaining cognition as constitutive of it.

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