Given the personal acquaintance between Alan M. Turing and W. Ross Ashby and the partial proximity of their research fields, a comparative view of Turing’s and Ashby’s works on modelling “the action of the brain” (in a 1946 letter from Turing to Ashby) will help to shed light on the seemingly strict symbolic/embodied dichotomy: while it is a straightforward matter to demonstrate Turing’s and Ashby’s respective commitments to formal, computational and material, analogue methods of modelling, there is no unambiguous mapping of these approaches onto symbol-based AI and embodiment-centered views respectively. Instead, it will be argued that both approaches, starting from a formal core, were at least partly concerned with biological and embodied phenomena, albeit in revealingly distinct ways.
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