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- Author:** Favareau, Donald
- Title:** Symbols are Grounded not in Things, but in Scaffolded Relations and their Semiotic Constraints
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- Abstract:** As the accompanying articles in the Special Issue on Semiotic Scaffolding will attest, my colleagues in biosemiotics have done an exemplary job in showing us how to think about the critically generative role that semiotic scaffolding plays “vertically” – i.e., in evolutionary and developmental terms – by “allowing access to the upper floors” of biological complexity, cognition and evolution. In addition to such diachronic considerations of semiotic scaffolding, I wish to offer here a consideration of semiotic scaffolding’s synchronic power, as well – and in particular the ability that it can afford its users to access new and other sign relations “horizontally” as a function of the way that multiple semiotically scaffolded relations intertwine to result in a “definite semantic topology that determines the ways that symbols modify each other’s referential functions in different combinations”. Taking up, in turn, Terrence Deacon’s later challenge that what the sciences of cognition – and biology more generally – needs to “come to grips with [is] the process of semiosis; the dynamic of interpretive activity by which semiotic relationships emerge from other semiotic relationships [as] intrinsically dynamic phases in a generative process”, I attempt here to show how Deacon’s own Peirce-inspired matrix of referential sign relations as presented in *The Symbolic Species*, when viewed as a semiotic scaffold of interactional constraints and possibility biases, provides the key to understanding the essentially thirdness-manifesting nature of symbol reference, formation and growth.
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