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Meaning is niche construction: semiotic artifacts and cognitive externalism

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How to provide a locus of observation for the formal notion of semiosis? The notions of niche and artifact are especially capable of updating the thesis, formulated by Peirce, that one cannot think without external signs, associating it to new empirical and theoretical methods and results. In this poster, we introduce the notion of niche of semiotic artifacts. In our approach, cognition is semiosis, sign-action, in a process that takes the form of niche construction. In comparison with current usages of the term artifact to mean a material “thing” which is produced, semiotic artifacts are processes, signs-in-action. Niches of semiotic artifacts are structured spaces of fundamental conditions for stability of sign-action, conditions such as situatedness (co-localization) and temporal distribution between communities of agents, artifacts, and their environments. Niches of semiotic artifacts offer conditions for emergence of habit and surprise in semiosis/cognition. This line of inquiry suggests a cognitive semiotics framework based on dynamical, distributed, and emergent relations.