



Introduction to ecosemiotics

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The application of a semiotic approach in biology or ecology is fundamentally different from applying mathematical or physical methods in life science. Semiotic biology, as well as semiotic ecology, means that we step over the limits of natural science, and what we get is thus an extended biology, (biosemiotics), and an extended ecology, (ecosemiotics), as well. The present paper begins by defining the term “ecosemiotics” (also known as “ecological semiotics” or “semiotic ecology”), as the study of the semiotic interrelations between organisms and their environment. The center of interest of ecosemiotics is not just a homo semioticus, but more generally, an organismus semioticus. Fundamental is the question concerning the relationship (always of a semiotic nature) between the organism and its environment. Ecosemioticians are interested in the study of sign processes, which are not restricted only to arbitrary and artificial signs. Ecosemiotics is also and perhaps primarily concerned with natural signs mediating between the organism and its environment. It is an approach to semiosis (defined as any form of activity, conduct or process that involves signs, including the production of meaning), based on the assumption of a very low “semiotic threshold” between signs and “non-signs”, if it does not reject such a threshold altogether. Semiosis in this case is by no means restricted only to processes in higher organisms, to culture and social convention. Any primitive biological organism already interacts semiotically with its environment when it selects or avoids energetic or material objects in its environment for the purpose of its own survival. Ecosemiotics can also be defined as the semiotics of the relationship between nature and culture. This includes research on the semiotic aspects of the place and role of nature for humans, what is and what has been the meaning of nature for us, humans, how and in what extent we communicate with nature.