



## Article

# Ecosemiotics Study of Erasure in Some Selected Posters

Salih Mahdi Adai Al Mamoor<sup>1\*</sup>, Nahla Mahmoud Hadi<sup>2</sup>

1,2. University of Babylon, College of Education for Human Sciences, Department of English, Iraq

\* Correspondence: [hum.Salih.Mahdi@uobabylon.edu.iq](mailto:hum.Salih.Mahdi@uobabylon.edu.iq)

**Abstract:** This study examines how linguistic and visual elements in environmental posters influence public perceptions of culture and nature, focusing on two examples: "The Space of Culture – the Place of Nature in Estonia and Beyond" and "Stop Deforestation." Using Stibbe's (2015) model of salience and erasure, the analysis highlights the contrasting communicative strategies employed. The first poster's hierarchical structure minimizes nature's role in cultural identity, while the second effectively uses urgent language and striking visuals to promote ecological awareness. The findings suggest that integrating diverse ecological perspectives into environmental communication can enhance public engagement and understanding of sustainability issues.

**Keywords:** Ecosemiotics, Erasure, Environmental Posters, Environmental Advocacy

## 1. Introduction

Ecosemiotics is a developing interdisciplinary field that investigates the connections between signs and the natural environment, effectively bridging semiotics, ecology, and cultural studies. It is defined as the study of sign processes that link organisms to their ecological contexts, emphasizing the semiotic characteristics of the environment and their impact on human perception and interaction with nature (Maran & Kull, 2014). This perspective goes beyond traditional semiotics by incorporating the viewpoints of various species and their distinct interpretations of environmental signs, thereby acknowledging the interconnectedness of all living beings within ecosystems (Nöth, 2001).

The origins of ecosemiotics can be traced back to early semioticians like Charles Sanders Peirce and Jakob von Uexküll, whose theories provided a foundation for understanding how organisms perceive and interpret their surroundings (Panzaru, 2008). Von Uexküll's (1982) concept of "Umwelt" illustrates how different species uniquely experience their environments, influenced by their biological needs and sensory capabilities. This idea is crucial for ecosemiotic analysis as it emphasizes the significance of context in the process of meaning-making.

Ecosemiotics has gained prominence within the environmental humanities, concentrating on how cultural representations of nature shape ecological practices and attitudes (Siewers, 2013). By exploring the semiotic aspects of environmental discourse, researchers aim to reveal how language and symbolism can either encourage sustainable practices or contribute to ecological harm. This study investigates the erasure techniques used in environmental posters through an ecosemiotic framework, analyzing how these strategies influence public engagement with ecological concerns.

**Citation:** Salih Mahdi Adai Al Mamoor, Nahla Mahmoud Hadi. Ecosemiotics Study of Erasure in Some Selected Posters. American Journal of Social and Humanitarian Research 2024, 5(12), 536-542.

Received: 6<sup>th</sup> Sept 2024  
Revised: 13<sup>th</sup> Oct 2024  
Accepted: 21<sup>st</sup> Nov 2024  
Published: 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 2024



**Copyright:** © 2024 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

This study aims to enhance our understanding of how signs influence our relationship with the environment and emphasize the vital role of effective communication in promoting ecological awareness. By applying a framework based on ecosemiotic principles, it seeks to clarify the intricate relationship between cultural narratives and environmental realities.

### **Erasure**

Ecosemiotics, which examines the relationship between signs and ecological contexts, provides a crucial framework for understanding how cultural representations shape perceptions of nature and environmental issues. Maran (2020) argues that ecosemiotics offers insights into the semiotic characteristics of ecosystems, emphasizing the interaction between human cultural processes and ecological signs. He posits that many ecological challenges stem from semiotic issues, such as "semiotic pollution," where human actions disrupt the communication and perception of non-human species. This perspective is essential for analyzing how erasure in environmental posters can obscure or misrepresent ecological truths.

In the realm of Eco poetry and environmental literature, researchers have highlighted that cultural representations often critique and reassess traditional views of nature, presenting alternatives that reflect interconnected relationships among all beings (Ghosh et al., 2020). This aligns with the idea that posters, as visual texts, can either reinforce or challenge prevailing narratives about nature. The use of erasure in these representations may simplify complex ecological issues, potentially creating a disconnect between audiences and the environmental realities portrayed.

Furthermore, Maran (2022) introduces the concept of "semiotic ground," suggesting that both human and non-human species share a semiotic framework that shapes their interactions with the environment. This notion is relevant when considering how erasure in posters might eliminate critical elements of these interactions, thus impacting public understanding and engagement with ecological matters. By examining which elements are omitted or emphasized in visual representations, researchers can gain insights into how these choices affect audience perceptions.

Cultural theory studies also emphasize the need to address the spatial and visual dimensions of culture-nature relationships (Peil, 2009). The erasure of specific elements in environmental posters can reflect broader societal attitudes toward nature and highlight the necessity for a more nuanced understanding of these relationships. This discussion is particularly pertinent in the context of the Anthropocene, where cultural narratives often grapple with themes of loss and regeneration (Matts, 2011).

It is suggested that erasure within ecosemiotic frameworks significantly influences how environmental issues are perceived and understood. By analyzing selected posters through this lens, researchers can uncover the complexities inherent in cultural representations of nature and their impact on public discourse regarding ecological challenges. This exploration not only contributes to ecosemiotic scholarship but also underscores the importance of critically engaging with visual texts to foster a more informed public awareness of environmental issues.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **The Data**

#### **Data Description**

This study utilizes a qualitative approach to investigate how linguistic expressions in environmental posters—specifically "The Space of Culture – the Place of Nature in Estonia and Beyond" and "Stop Deforestation"—influence perceptions of culture and nature. The analysis is grounded in Stibbe's (2015) model, which focuses on two primary concepts: salience and erasure. Salience pertains to the emphasized elements, including

word choice, imagery, color schemes, and layout, that shape how viewers interpret cultural and natural themes. In contrast, erasure looks at the exclusion of certain voices, particularly those of indigenous communities and current environmental issues, assessing how these omissions contribute to narratives that disconnect cultural identity from ecological realities.

### **Data Collection**

The main data sources will include both visual and textual components from the selected posters, which will be sourced from relevant publications or online platforms. The analysis will be conducted in three phases:

1. Visual Analysis: This phase will examine the imagery and design features of the posters.
2. Textual Analysis: This phase will evaluate language choices, key phrases, and overall messaging.
3. Contextual Analysis: This phase will investigate the broader cultural and ecological contexts related to the themes presented in the posters.

### **The Criteria**

The study will apply specific criteria to assess how effectively each poster promotes ecological awareness while addressing issues of salience and erasure:

1. Evaluation of how well the posters highlight aspects of culture and nature through visual and textual elements.
2. Analysis of which perspectives or issues are missing from the narratives depicted in the posters.
3. Assessment of how effectively the posters connect with contemporary cultural identities and ecological realities.
4. Evaluation of whether the posters enhance viewers' understanding of environmental issues.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis is organized into qualitative and quantitative segments, each aimed at providing a thorough understanding of how visual and textual elements interact to construct narratives surrounding ecological issues.

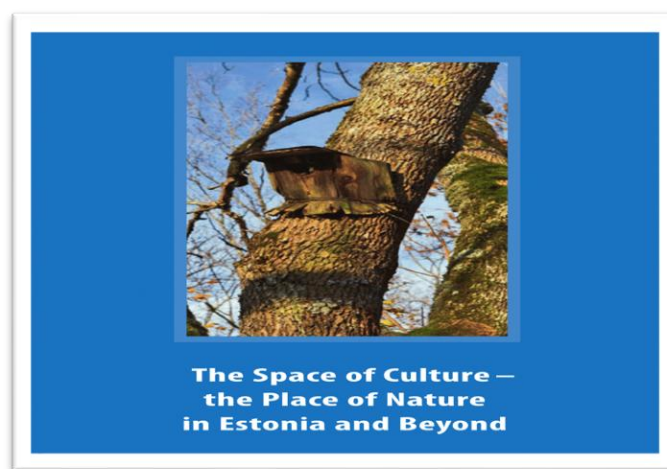


Figure 1. The Space of Culture – the Place of Nature in Estonia and Beyond

The above poster highlights significant issues regarding the representation of culture and nature, particularly through the lens of ecosemiotics. The title "The Space of Culture – the Place of Nature in Estonia and Beyond" suggests a dual focus on cultural and natural elements. However, the terminology employed indicates a hierarchical dynamic: culture is framed as a "space," while nature is relegated to a mere "place." This linguistic choice subtly diminishes nature's significance, positioning it as secondary to cultural identity. Moreover, the emphasis on human-centric notions like "culture" overshadows ecological terminology such as "ecosystem" or "biodiversity." This reflects a prevailing cultural narrative that prioritizes human achievements over the intrinsic value of the natural world, thereby erasing its importance in contemporary discourse.

The use of a blue background in the design evokes feelings of calmness and tranquility, often associated with natural elements like the sky and water. However, when this blue is muted and subdued, it suggests that nature is present yet not emphasized as a focal point. This visual choice creates a sense of distance from nature, portraying it as a passive component within the overarching cultural narrative. The inclusion of a tree in the poster serves as a direct representation of nature. The tree symbolizes strength and growth, highlighting nature's importance within the cultural context. In contrast, warm colors used for cultural elements draw attention away from the blue background and tree, allowing them to recede visually. This composition implies that culture dominates over nature, aligning with narratives that prioritize human experiences while relegating nature to a supportive role.

Furthermore, the poster references cultural heritage without acknowledging its ecological significance, effectively erasing the environmental contexts that underpin these practices. Such omissions can lead to misunderstandings regarding how cultural events are deeply intertwined with ecological practices—like seasonal cycles or agricultural traditions reliant on local ecosystems. In addition, the absence of references to pressing environmental issues—such as climate change and biodiversity loss—suggests a deliberate exclusion of critical ecological concerns from cultural conversations. This lack of engagement reinforces a disconnect between culture and nature, implying that cultural identity exists independently from environmental realities. By neglecting these urgent issues, the poster risks perpetuating a narrative that prioritizes human experiences while sidelining vital ecological challenges.

Nature appears merely as a backdrop—a tree situated within a cultural scene—diminishing its role as an essential narrative element. This representation fosters disconnection from ecological realities, portraying culture and nature as if they exist independently from one another. Such framing can contribute to the erasure of significant ecological relationships and may influence perceptions of Estonian identity as separate from its natural surroundings. This disconnection undermines nature's role in shaping cultural identity. Ultimately, by failing to advocate for ecological responsibility or awareness, the poster risks perpetuating a narrative that neglects nature and diminishes environmental consciousness within cultural discussions.



Figure 2. Stop Deforestation

The title "Stop Deforestation" immediately communicates a pressing need for environmental protection. However, the wording prompts consideration of the underlying relationship between humans and nature. The term "stop" implies that deforestation is an active process instigated by human actions, positioning people as both the instigators and potential remedy for this ecological crisis. This perspective emphasizes a human-centered view, which may obscure the inherent worth of forests and ecosystems.

The visual components of the poster are essential in delivering its message. A powerful image depicting a tree being felled can evoke emotions of loss and devastation. This imagery serves as a stark reminder of the repercussions of deforestation, yet it risks portraying nature merely as a backdrop for human endeavors. Such representation may unintentionally reinforce a narrative that views nature primarily as a resource for exploitation instead of recognizing it as a vital part of our ecosystem that warrants protection.

The color scheme utilized in the poster can greatly affect its emotional resonance. Earthy hues, like greens and browns, typically symbolize life and growth, while sharp contrasts with grays or reds may indicate destruction or peril. This contrast creates visual tension that highlights the severe consequences of deforestation, reinforcing the urgent call to action. However, if the colors skew too much toward dark or foreboding tones, they might evoke feelings of despair rather than empowerment, potentially deterring viewers from taking constructive action. The poster's failure to include specific references to indigenous communities or local ecological wisdom can lead to an erasure of crucial connections between people and their environments.

Numerous cultures have profound ties to forests that are frequently overlooked in wider environmental discussions. By neglecting these viewpoints, the poster risks perpetuating a narrative that favors Western conservation perspectives while marginalizing indigenous voices that have long championed sustainable practices. Furthermore, if the poster does not tackle current environmental challenges such as climate change or biodiversity loss, it may create a disconnect between cultural identity and ecological realities. This omission implies that deforestation is an isolated issue rather than part of a broader environmental crisis that requires urgent attention. By ignoring these interconnected challenges, the poster could inadvertently reinforce a narrative that separates cultural identity from ecological stewardship.

To summarize, while the "Stop Deforestation" poster seeks to raise awareness about an urgent environmental issue, its effectiveness depends on how well it balances human-centered narratives with a sincere acknowledgment of nature's intrinsic value. By promoting ecological responsibility and incorporating diverse cultural perspectives, such posters can significantly contribute to discussions about conservation and inspire collective action aimed at safeguarding our planet's essential resources.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The examination of the posters yields notable insights into their linguistic and visual components. The first poster establishes a hierarchical distinction in its title, using "space" to refer to culture and "place" for nature, which implies that nature plays a lesser role in cultural identity. It emphasizes human-centric language, overshadowing ecological terms, and employs a muted color palette that creates emotional distance from nature, portraying it as a passive element. Furthermore, it lacks references to indigenous knowledge and contemporary environmental issues, resulting in a disconnect between cultural practices and ecological contexts.

In contrast, the "Stop Deforestation" poster employs urgent imperative language like "Stop," which encourages immediate action and fosters a sense of collective responsibility with phrases such as "Save Our Planet." Its compelling imagery of deforestation captures



attention and elicits emotional reactions related to loss, using a vibrant color scheme that highlights the gravity of the issue. It effectively underscores the consequences of deforestation through its visuals and language, promoting ecological awareness while aligning with contemporary environmental movements. However, it also misses opportunities to include indigenous perspectives or local ecological knowledge that could enhance its narrative. Overall, "The Space of Culture" risks reinforcing a narrative that separates cultural identity from ecological realities due to its hierarchical framing and omission of critical voices, while "Stop Deforestation" successfully engages viewers but could improve by incorporating diverse ecological perspectives.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is revealed that the considerable influence of linguistic and visual elements on how the public perceives culture and nature. The hierarchical structure of the first poster, along with its lack of essential ecological viewpoints, risks reinforcing a narrative that separates cultural identity from environmental concerns. In contrast, the second poster successfully employs urgent language and compelling visuals to capture viewer attention and enhance ecological awareness, although it could be strengthened by including a broader range of ecological perspectives. Collectively, these insights emphasize the necessity for careful representation in environmental communication, indicating that future initiatives should aim for a more cohesive approach that recognizes the interplay between cultural and ecological narratives. This cohesion is vital for deepening understanding of environmental issues and motivating effective actions toward sustainability.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] D. Ghosh, E. Musi, K. Upasani, and S. Muresan, "Interpreting Verbal Irony: Linguistic Strategies and the Connection to the Type of Semantic Incongruity," *ACL Anthology*, 2020.
- [2] T. Maran, "Ecosemiotics: The Study of Signs in Changing Ecologies," 2020. [Online]. Available: [https://lepo.it.da.ut.ee/~timo\\_m/publikatsioonid/Maran\\_2020\\_Ecosemiotics.pdf](https://lepo.it.da.ut.ee/~timo_m/publikatsioonid/Maran_2020_Ecosemiotics.pdf)
- [3] T. Maran, "Ecosemiotics of the Anthropocene," 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://leslie.dartmouth.edu/news/2022/09/ecosemiotics-anthropocene-timo-maran>
- [4] T. Maran and K. Kull, "Ecosemiotics: Main Principles and Current Developments," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, vol. 96, no. 1, pp. 41–50, 2014. doi: 10.1111/geob.12037.
- [5] T. Matts, "Violent Signs: Ecocriticism and the Symptom," Ph.D. dissertation, Cardiff University, 2011.
- [6] W. Nöth, "Ecosemiotics: The Study of Sign Processes Which Relate Organisms to Their Natural Environment," in *Sign Systems Studies*, vol. 29, nos. 1-2, pp. 1-12, K. Kull, T. Maran, and J. von Uexküll, Eds., Tartu University Press, 2001.
- [7] O. Panzaru, "Introduction to Ecosemiotics," *Universitatea de Științe Agricole și Medicină Veterinară Iași*, 2008.
- [8] T. Peil, "The Space of Culture – The Place of Nature in Estonia and Beyond," in *Cultural Theory Conference Proceedings*, 2009. [Online]. Available: <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/34476/425733.pdf>
- [9] A. K. Siewers, *Re-Imagining Nature: Environmental Humanities and Ecosemiotics*, Bucknell University Press, 2013.
- [10] J. von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, University of Minnesota Press, 1982.
- [11] T. Matts, "Violent Signs: Ecocriticism and the Symptom," Ph.D. dissertation, Cardiff University, 2011.
- [12] P. Odendaal, "Sounding Relations to Grond and Water: Responding to Social-Ecological Change Through Spoken Word Poetry," Ph.D. dissertation, Queensland University of Technology, 2020.
- [13] A. Mitchell, "Visualizing the Permanent Lie: An Examination of Dystopian Literature Using Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's Model," 2023.
- [14] C. Crichlow et al., "APRJA Minor Tech."

- 
- [15] R. Boer and E. W. Conrad, "Redirected Travel," 2003, pp. 1-264.
- [16] M. Welch, "Signs of Trouble: Semiotics, Streetscapes, and the Republican Struggle in the North of Ireland," *Crime, Media, Culture*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 7-32, 2020.
- [17] C. Sommerer, L. Mignonneau, and M. Shamiyeh, "Solar Display: A Self-Powered Media Facade," *Being Syncretic*, pp. 271, 2008.
- [18] R. Özsari, "Rhetoric-Semiotics Relationship," *Looking to the Future with Semiotics*, p. 205.
- [19] T. Martens, "Multispecies Communication in Popular Culture: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Human and Nonhuman Communication in Sci-Fi Films," 2024.
- [20] S. Salupere, "Towards a Political Theory of Semiocide."