

# METATHEORETICAL COMMITMENTS IN HUMANITIES-BASED INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH PROGRAMS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is something fuzzy about the humanities. Boundaries, definitions, axioms and corollaries are not quite what they seem, at least not compared (from the outside) to the scientific practice that lends itself to be called *scientific* by most. Dealing with interdisciplinary research programs that combine the humanities with (some) scientific background takes a number of commitments from the researcher's side, namely, the scope to which a theory can be applied and the selection of competing theories within disparate fields. There are many different problems that arise during the examination of interdisciplinary theories that make use of those disparate fields, such as the apparent need for bridge theories and a legible intersectionality between different aspects of a potentially similar object of study (if at all possible).

Definitions become a point of contention as do the borrowings of terminology from different fields when applied independently. In this paper we will explore how certain practices in humanities-based interdisciplinary research programs make not only theoretical commitments to objects in different fields, but also metatheoretical commitments about the application of said objects within the space of the theories developed. The crucial claim here is that the integration of different methods can be done only within certain parameters, but humanities-based research programs can have a wide enough scope to make metatheoretical commitments hard to crack and of differing nature given the expected results of the theories in question. We will focus on the field of semiotics as a prime example of a wide-range, highly interdisciplinary humanities-based program in order to assess what lies in its theory-building practices when borrowing from other fields.

## 2. METATHEORY AND ITS COMMITMENTS IN THE HUMANITIES

It is disingenuous to talk about metatheory in the humanities as a whole, because the breadth of topics the concept of humanities covers is not only overwhelming, but also diverse enough that there is hardly a way to frame all the humanities under specific theoretical commitments of their own. However, there are declared areas of the humanities that lend themselves to (some) cohesion in their theoretical constitution and within which talking about metatheory is not outlandish. The focus

of this paper will be semiotics in particular, and as such there are two assumptions to be made: 1. that semiotics is part of the humanities; and 2. that semiotics lends itself to a cohesive theory. The first assumption needs not be defended, but it is worth stating it clearly. Semiotics, as the area of knowledge that cares about signification in a variety of systems, stems from and is centered around practices common to the humanities (claims about interdisciplinarity will come later). The second assumption, however, needs some justification. Semiotics is a variegated discipline and a point of encounter of traditions that may not have that much to do with each other, coming from linguistics, epistemology and logic, and with a formal convergence only later in the life of the discipline. Yet, the principles that governed this convergence were borne out of necessity *and* compatibility (Sebeok, 2001). Basically, notions of what a study of signification entails in contexts beyond the linguistic can easily be subsumed under the general idea of what signs do, so disputes on what concepts are more adequate to a particular way of studying specific types of signification pertain to the idea that signification is structured in signs and chains of signs. The variety of propositions on what signs may be are presented within a common dichotomy of dyadic and triadic relations and spread from that starting point, which is to say, there is a more or less standard and shared terminology within the different branches of semiotics and they tend to make reference to the same starting point. One point of contention lies in that signs *may* not necessarily be the object of study of semiotics,<sup>1</sup> but they are an ever-present terminological tool for the field.

The branching of semiotics has come as a result of the discipline's general nature. As the development of institutionalized semiotics is tightly connected with its standing in linguistics, the conditions established by semiotics imply that its areas of study have something to do with *signification* following some possible linguistic patterns. These general principles seem to be shared by all branches of semiotics, including those deeply invested in Peircean semiotics and those within the continental, semiological tradition. The theoretical cohesion of assumption 2 is a given in that terminologically and philosophically, semiotics and its branches share a concern for signification and the presence of signs, and there is both a sense of unity in the concepts and in the approaches used for semiotic research.

Despite the fact that semiotics branches into specific forms with differentiated objects of study,<sup>2</sup> the claim of cohesion is not weakened because what is accepted as type-semiotics, institutionally speaking, still requires of the concepts of semiotics to be taken as such.

**2.1. Interdisciplinary necessity in semiotics.** Type-semiotics do not generally make claims about signs themselves, unlike general semiotics. Instead, they

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<sup>1</sup>With alternatives as *text* and *code* as some of the most prominent ones.

<sup>2</sup>The object of study of the specific branches of semiotics should, as a rule of thumb, be described as 'signification related to a specific object or situation.' One possible exception to this rule is *general semiotics* as the field concerned with the abstract aspects of semiotic theory.

set their aims at explaining sign processes within specific contexts, such as the sphere of social interaction, specific arts and practices, or the types of organisms involved in signifying practices. At the same time, this means that the focus of type-semiotics is not entirely dependent on semiotic concepts. Instead, for type-semiotics to thrive, they necessitate insights from fields already established within the conventions of the type they intend to study. That is, for sociosemiotics to be so, it cannot operate solely on semiotic conventions, but requires sociological research to extract semiotic insights from. This is the same for areas like zoosemiotics, where semiotic terminology is at service of ethology and zoology as a way to work together and make sense of the acquired knowledge from those disciplines *through* a semiotic insight. Interdisciplinarity is a core value for semiotics because type-semiotics thoroughly depend on bringing different insights within non-semiotic methodologies. This is a key point in the wide scope of the semiotics program (to call it something), because while philosophical at its core, type-semiotics delve into different subjects with both the specificity of a chosen program within the area of study and a number of premises from general semiotics.

Considering then the specific nature of type-semiotics and their continuous commitment to a more or less general theory, semiotics presents an interesting case to study metatheory within the humanities.

### 3. METATHEORETICAL COMMITMENTS IN A NUTSHELL

When we talk about metatheoretical commitments, we need to distinguish them from theoretical commitments within a discipline. The explicit commitments of semiotics to deal with *signs*, *meaning-making* and so on are the guiding line for semiotic theory to operate across different domains, and their immediate philosophical background (such as Peircean semiotics, or, rarely, its rejection) tells us about what the theory is supposed to do and how the research should proceed. However, metatheoretical commitments are not an explicit part of theory, and instead they depend on what the theory is thought to do not only related to its outcomes, but also to its constitution as a theory and its dependence on the explicit philosophical claims made by it. But how can we find the metatheoretical commitments of an overarchingly interdisciplinary theory? If metatheory in general “can be seen as the philosophy behind the theory, the fundamental set of ideas about how phenomena of interest in a particular field should be thought about and researched” (Bates, 2005), or a “coherent set of interlocking principles that both describes and prescribes what is meaningful and meaningless” (Overton, 2007), or even “the empirical scientific theory of scientific theorizing” (Meehl, 2004), then metatheoretical commitments are those related to how a theory is supposed to do its theorizing *with respect to* its area of study, notwithstanding the fact that we may think we actually do metatheory in different ways. A theoretical commitment in semiotics is that signs, via Peirce, are three part relations. A metatheoretical

commitment in semiotics may then be identified in that talking about signs necessitates meaning to operate through the structure of the signs that we describe. Making the distinction between the philosophical background of the theory and metatheory is not easy because they are embroiled in a philosophical yarn ball. This seems to be a particularly complex issue for semiotics, because of a divide between positions on whether semiotics is a methodology or a point of view (Deely, 2009), but we will examine what 'semiotic metatheory' may actually look like in what follows.

The identification of metatheoretical commitments depends on our view on theory in general. Wozniak writes that "[m]etatheoretical analysis in psychology begins with the question of what constitutes proper subject matter for psychological science" (1986, 41), but this does not seem to apply so readily to semiotics given the previously mentioned interdisciplinary condition of the discipline. Now, the issue that Wozniak sees in psychology lies in that the subject matter of psychology is variegated as it is, with multiple answers to the question. Yet, *in general lines*, there is a core of ideas that should pertain to psychology. But then, the problem remains in how to achieve explanations, with the answer readily in sight: a particular metatheoretical commitment about what psychology should care about.

Semiotics does not sanction the integration of different paradigms, and the core of the theory can be represented in such general lines that at times it may seem that semiotics is a metatheory of its own. This is not the line I wish to follow though. My own view on this topic is that the semiotic background of different type-semiotics coalesce into one discipline of its own, bringing novel insights not to the type fields it deals with, but through them. The shared core of ideas is more formal than a shared set of expected theoretical outcomes, partly because of institutional development, partly because of philosophical commitments to disciplinary tenets.

When it comes to metatheoretical commitments then, we may stick to the view that these are different from philosophical commitments (semiotics makes a number of philosophical commitments, and some of these may be opposed depending on who you ask) and that they say something about how we ought to develop our theories. There's something to be said about whether these metatheoretical commitments are to be distinguished from potential paradigms, capable of being overthrown by a change in status, and while the jury is still out on the answer, Hein (1969) doesn't believe that metatheoretical commitments are thrown out when new theories discard old, wrong ideas, lingering instead as an eternal dispute between camps already in one specific line. The question of whether these count as metatheoretical commitments (in Hein's case it's mechanism vs. vitalism in biology) makes, however, things muddier again, as these are partly philosophical commitments in that they defend a metaphysical position on the standing of the discipline. Stich (1985), following Eysenck, understands metatheory as related

to Kuhnian paradigms and dealing, at least in psychology, with distinctions between what a science focuses on and allows as valid.<sup>3</sup> Yet, metaphilosophy, if taken as a sort of metatheory, “cannot be represented as a subset of the set of philosophical knowledge” (Brutian, 2012, 304) because it cannot solve the problems of philosophy, so it is more of a function of philosophy instead. If metaphilosophy is construed as “a particular view of what genuine philosophical problems are and of what the activity of the philosopher consists in, or ought to consist in,” (Overgaard et al., 2013, 6)<sup>4</sup> we can count on the fact that metaphilosophical points can be argued for philosophically. These, however, seem distinct enough from philosophical claims about the nature of the sciences, particularly regarding the concept of metatheoretical commitments as we have seen them used earlier.

The distinction is hard to grasp because metatheoretical and philosophical commitments are both intertwined and interdependent. If I argue philosophically that the mind cannot be a computer and that neural correlates of perception are not equal to perception, I will have both a metaphysical perspective and a commitment to a way to approach psychology. This baggage leaves us with a notion of metatheoretical commitments as those commitments in a theory that say how theory building is supposed to be (and by extension how it ought not to be) and to what degree the theory can do what it set out to do. The extension of a metatheoretical commitment could be further fleshed out by stating that these do not require a methodological approach from the discipline itself, as a way to paraphrase Brutian’s view, but if I am committed to, say, the computational view of mind, then I am making a claim that can be approached (to some degree) methodologically. Metatheoretical commitments then are not necessarily commitments that lie beyond the boundaries of the discipline, but in my view they should not be taken as fully *within* it either. To make matters clear then, when I am metatheoretically committed to the computational theory of mind, for example, I am:

- Making a metaphysical claim about the core object of the discipline.
- Making a methodological assumption *lato sensu* about how things within the theory should be approached.
- Taking a stand on where theory as it currently is expressed deals with a *syntagmatic* notion of the theory.

These three stances, all coming together at apparently the same time, are not exactly contiguous in that their multidimensionality does not seem to be a given. Yet, as we have come to understand the position of metatheory in a specific theory (and all the issues that have come with dealing with obscured metatheoretical and metaphysical claims in general), it seems that all these items we have mentioned before are actually inextricably connected when it comes to understanding the

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<sup>3</sup>Stich adds the computational view of the mind to the list of metatheoretical commitments in psychology (88).

<sup>4</sup>Overgaard et al. divide the central metaphilosophical questions into *what* philosophy is, *how* we should do it and *why* we should do it (11); as good a starting point as any for us.

background of a certain application, method or opinion on something within a specific set of knowledge. The previous three-point scheme of what happens when I state a metatheoretical commitment can be further fleshed out point by point. Making a metaphysical claim about the core object of the discipline, or the *ontological commitment*, is what allows us to say that the object of the theory is so-and-so, dependent on certain structures of reality or lacking those. Making a methodological assumption about the theory, or the *methodological commitment*, allows us to state, most likely following the ontological commitment, how the object of our theories can be approached at all. Finally, taking a stand on the expression of the theory against its other expressions in time, or the *historical commitment*, quite possibly following the methodological commitment, provides a corrective view on what the theory has tried to do so far and where it should set out to be looking forward. All three combined give us at least a bigger picture of what happens when we *state* that something has metatheoretical value for us. I believe this tripartite description of metatheoretical commitments should do enough work for us to make our own claims and to study how these have been used, explicitly or otherwise, in semiotics as an interdisciplinary endeavor.

#### 4. METATHEORY IN SEMIOTICS

The first question we could ask, though it's probably not one we'd like to hear, is whether semiotics is a theory, allowing us to talk about metatheory in the first place. As we have already mentioned, there exists a divide between the view that states semiotics is a method and the one that states it is a point of view. The historical status of this dispute, along with the maligned distinction between semiology and semiotics, leaves us with an apparent problem to face before we can even comment on semiotic metatheory, but as it stands, it would seem that both ways of talking about semiotics already imply a certain metatheory to begin with. That is, even that discussion forces us to make claims about the object of the discipline, the methodology and its place within the history of the discipline. Now, the distinction between semiology (as the continental, culture-based understanding of dyadic signs) and semiotics (as the Peircean variety that takes a more fundamental stand on what signs are) is an earlier example of important metatheoretical commitments and the dispute generated by those. Yet, as this difference has become less and less relevant to academic semiotics with the Peircean variety taking the lion's share of researchers' interests and the coalescence of concepts and objects of study under similar methodologies, semiotics has also changed into a more cohesive discipline (to a degree).<sup>5</sup> Semiotics is then a theory insofar as it allows us to speak of its object of study and its particular approach openly, and even if we think of it as a mere methodology to append to, say, the study of culture, this is

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<sup>5</sup>There is a wealth of literature on the topic of semiology vs. semiotics, including Sebeok (2001), Deely (2006), Hénault (2010), and a multitude more of opinions on how to distinguish both, which, depending on who you ask, may be harder or easier to accomplish.

still achieved through a by and large particular philosophical stand (that signs can be studied in a particular way, that they are of value in studying the things that we think produce and consume them, and so on). Having overcome this problem (or at least circumvented it), we can move freely in the camp of metatheory as it has been discussed within semiotics.

For starters, semioticians have recognized the variety of discourses within semiotics. Pelc (1986) distinguishes between a variety of possibilities within the polysemy of semiotics and identifies *metasemiotics* as “a theory or science which examines semiotics<sub>s</sub> and its separate fields from a higher level. This higher level is called metatheoretical or metascientific” (901).<sup>6</sup> Being able to talk about semiotic theory is what matters the most to us, and while Pelc’s typology of interlaced concepts within the concept of semiotics didn’t take, it reveals, if anything, the intention of explicit metatheoretical discussion within the discipline. Eco’s seminal *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976), while setting the ground for proper theory (or semiotics<sub>s</sub> in Pelc’s terms) incurs in a brief discussion on what makes the theory coherent, and this is already a strong marker of metatheoretical commitments. He identifies ‘political’ and ‘natural’ boundaries to his semiotic project (5), with the former dealing with interdisciplinarity and the state of the discipline with regards to some of its objects of interest; the latter, on the other hand, are those “beyond which a semiotic approach cannot go; for there is non-semiotic territory since there are phenomena that cannot be taken as sign-functions” (6). Even though Eco does not make these claims as explicitly metatheoretical, it is clear from what we have already discussed that their validity within his theory is a metatheoretical stance. There are different examples of the usage of the concept of metatheory in semiotics without much of a consensus on what is actually meant by it. Forte (2007) treats semiotics as a metatheory for science, with theories “as semiotic resources for communicating and meeting challenges encountered by theory users” (12), establishing its basis in the recognition of sign types within scientific discourse. Mazzola et al. (2016) use semiotic notions such as sign systems to develop a theory for understanding music. Lanigan (1979) sees human communication itself as “projects in metatheory construction” (293), with theories structured under three rules, message, context and code (295). These three explicit mentions of metatheory in the context of semiotics have something in common: Semiotics is seen as a method through which we can talk about specific scientific theories. This puts semiotics at a rather foundational position, capable of discussing how theories develop. However, this vision is only useful if we believe theories are organized linguistically (in the case of Lanigan) or semiotically (in both other cases). In these cases, metatheoretical commitments take the form of acceptance of semiotic terminology as able to depict the conditions of specific theories, but in the case of music analysis, as far as semiotics is concerned, it would seem that the idea is simply a theoretical

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<sup>6</sup>Of note is the subscript distinction made by Pelc. In this case, semiotics<sub>s</sub> means the scientific, theoretical aspect of the concept of semiotics (901).

commitment, not a metatheoretical one, because semiotics is used in the analysis, not as a way to make sense whether such an analysis is valid at all.

**4.1. The metasemiotic.** If explicit metatheoretical claims in semiotics are unclear,<sup>7</sup> perhaps we can focus on what counts as metasemiotic. Hjelmslev's distinction is perhaps foundational here in that, through his view on linguistics, he coins the idea of a *metasemiotics* as a language to speak of language (1961), remembering that in the hierarchy he establishes, the semiotic is much more general. This understanding, popular as it has been,<sup>8</sup> does not give us a unified view of what exactly semioticians mean when they use the term of metasemiotics. Urban (2006) derives the concept from Peircean semiotics, its aim being a more complete understanding of "agency and intentionality in social action" (91), though it is less clear how this metasemiotics is different from semiotics as a discipline altogether (at least in its Peircean variety), most likely because of the way hierarchization works within semiotics. (Nöth, 1995, 379) mentions metasemiotic analysis in discourse ideology as a way to analyze how ideologically compromised semiotic statements about ideological discourse may be. Long story short, the situation with the metasemiotic is less than ideal because it refers to scrutiny over semiotic statements. This does not seem to be of much help when trying to make sense of metatheory, being limited instead to statements about the intention behind other semiotic statements.

Metasemiotic statements are partially metatheoretical, as they discuss the possibility of scrutiny of semiotic statements.<sup>9</sup> Yet, metasemiotics is not unified as a concept and it can be a blanket term for referring to the analysis of semiotic statements. Remembering the interdisciplinary nature of semiotics, metasemiotics as this bundle of concepts does not do much work in helping us understand how metatheory is expressed in semiotics. The question we should ask ourselves is, are there metatheoretical commitments in semiotics when the discipline expands into other areas?

**4.2. Metatheoretical commitments given in type-semiotics.** Theory-building in an interdisciplinary context depends on the (hopefully successful) integration of methods from a source discipline, in this case semiotics, and the neighboring area of interest (hence the type prefix). By joining ends, the commitments to the source are necessarily complemented by some commitments of the target. So say, when we do biosemiotics, we have a whole spectrum of ontological and theoretical commitments about what semiotics does in general and what it *can* do in specific

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<sup>7</sup>And to be blunt, they need not be. Metatheory often lies in the unspoken.

<sup>8</sup>It can be seen used, from the Hjelmslevian source, across large swathes of research, including Barthes (1997), Lotman (1988) and Eco (1976), but also in works using the concept for the purpose of analysis as Speelman (1995) or Walldén (2012).

<sup>9</sup>Siertsema (1955) even goes so far as to coin *metametasemiotics* when studying Hjelmslev's metasemiotics.



cases when it comes to focusing on the biological world. The idea *lato sensu* is that signs are an important part of the biological constitution of living beings, and that biology cannot do without the study of signs in the processes involving said living beings. When we get to the fine-grained discussion on what biosemiotics actually does, we find a number of differing argumental lines, the Peircean, the Peircean-Uexküllian, the code paradigm, and so on. The specifics of each, of necessity, deal in different metatheoretical commitments, and using the three-point distinction described earlier, we can see that the Peircean and the code paradigms<sup>10</sup> insist on different ontological and methodological commitments regarding the concepts of sign to be used and how these play out at the moment of analysis. If a Peircean theory sees sign relations as foundational to meaning-making in organisms, code biology skips the talk about signs and deals with codes and signal transduction to come up with a different sense of meaning. This also has repercussions in how both arguments align themselves with the historical context of semiotics, as code biology attempts to distance itself from the Peircean roots of biosemiotics and creates an opposing discourse (Barbieri, 2015, 168). The clash of perspectives here is an interesting one in that the concrete opposition in the historical axis between both comes as a result from the differences in their object and methodologies.

While other areas of semiotics may not have such a dramatic divergence in explicit claims about the problems of the opposing view within the discipline,<sup>11</sup> the point that stands is that the interdependence between claims of the type being studied under type-semiotics and of general semiotics is nothing to scoff at. Even if type-semiotics attempts to act in a *scientific* manner, it depends on conceptions from the source discipline, marking not only the interest in the specific phenomena being adduced for type-semiotics to be of such a type, but also making the phenomena explorable as a semiotic phenomenon. If we care about meaning and meaning-making, and we are veering away from a linguistic perspective, then our meaning-making will have to be grounded in specific ideas about how it happens and to what extent (which can be signs, sign relations, codes and so on).

So what sort of metatheoretical commitments can we find in type-semiotics, assuming type-semiotics are representative of some intersectionality between disciplines under the guidance of semiotic theory? Despite the interdependence we have identified between sides, type-semiotics feed primarily from semiotic theory, partly ontologically and partly methodologically, as all potential forms of type-semiotics need to respond to the question of meaning-making within a delimited context. That is, the foundational question becomes “how is meaning-making possible within this type of knowledge?” In the case of biosemiotics, despite the differences between possible approaches, does the same, using variations on the

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<sup>10</sup>I am, however, using the concept of paradigm loosely here.

<sup>11</sup>The case of code biology *as* biosemiotics is still a matter of debate, but we have treated it as a type of biosemiotics with a specific metatheoretical commitment.

concept of meaning-making. But this is the crucial point of difference: ontological commitments are reflected, on the semiotic side, in the form the concept takes. Naturalization, as a corollary to biosemiotics, is also of a variable nature, producing again effects on ontology and methodology. While there is no certain way to establish a hierarchy of relevance and precedence, it is safe to admit, at least, that for a type-semiotics it is the semiotics that precedes the type. Metatheoretical commitments as we have used them are combined, but they are shaped in principle by the parent discipline.<sup>12</sup>

## 5. EXTRAPOLATING TO A MORE GENERAL PICTURE

The case of semiotics is useful because of the high degree of interdisciplinary adventures its practitioners embark on. But can we say the same about other disciplines in the humanities? Is philosophy on the same boat as semiotics? There is, indeed, something fuzzy about the humanities. History as an interdisciplinary endeavor may present similar characteristics as semiotics—integrating multiple paradigms and focusing on different scales but retaining a sense of the study of history—, but there is something dissimilar here in that history seems to maintain a closer tie to social sciences, even if this dwindles at times (Rotberg et al., 2017, 293) and it does not seem to constrain options in conceptual strategies as semiotics apparently does. Yet, I believe we can extrapolate a number of examples from semiotics for other areas of the humanities, at least in a general sense. The fact that the humanities is more of a blanket term should not deter us in understanding scientific notions based off premises from traditional humanities. If semiotics serves as a case for generalization when it comes to interdisciplinary programs with a humanities-based core (and we seem to keep expanding all traditional areas of the humanities this way), then what remains to be understood is how commitments from one discipline play out with commitments from the areas integrated to the research. If language is to be studied as an embodied phenomenon, for instance, the metatheory will have *something* to say about previous methods of doing linguistics (as either wrongheaded or incomplete) and about what counts as useful, meaningful linguistic phenomena. Interdisciplinarity does resignify the means by which we acquire data on the target discipline, but it remains to see if the metatheoretical commitments of the chosen target discipline and the specific methods we care about produce long-term change in the metatheoretical commitments on the source discipline. If we think about biosemiotics, it is a rather synchronous process in that it is due to advances in the biology of cognition and ethology that gave rise to objections about linguisticism within semiotics as a way to understand cognition. Yet it is what semiotics can say about cognition and ethology that reifies the original commitment to signs seen as relations, for instance, in order to make

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<sup>12</sup>This does not mean that the type cannot influence and eventually change the parent discipline, but in order for the type-discipline to come up as such, the parent discipline has to have some currency.

claims *about* animal cognition from a semiotic perspective. Metatheoretical commitments in specific areas of the humanities are expressed in their philosophical backgrounds and potential branching, but when adding a foreign component in the form of a subdisciplinary integration from a different area, concessions must be made by force of methods and breadth of relevance of the target discipline. If biosemiotics is to be biosemiotics, in our example, it is not enough for it to assume that semiotics is a complete option to study the biological, but rather, that coupled with some biology, it has the potential to provide some semiotic explanations within the field of biology. The same most likely applies to other forms of interdisciplinary research, but when it comes to the humanities, there are still many things left unsaid about the possibility of reconciliation of assumed potential methodologies in the concretization of a research project involving areas that indeed act within more concrete parameters. The case of semiotics gives us some wiggle room for generalizations about how metatheoretical commitments usually work in the humanities, but the way certain parts of the humanities deal with interdisciplinarity may present themselves with either top-down or bottom-up arrows of relevance. Still, the point to take home is that humanities with research programs that require a connection with other fields partake in metatheoretical commitments, and these form part of the constraints of a theory, notwithstanding potential conflicts with other areas of the same theory. Examining these metatheoretical commitments, and being aware of their shape, can help us make our theories within the humanities more robust against possible contradictions while also parcelling out the field's different positions. Even in strongly interdisciplinary fields like semiotics, there is much work to be done on the self-awareness of research and what it stands on, but doing this work, though tedious, can significantly help us flesh out what pertains to our own theories.

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