

(Inter)disciplinary Concerns after the Zizekian synthesis

This paper will demonstrate how a peculiar interdisciplinary mechanism (and its unarticulated theoretical underpinnings) lies at the heart of a variety of debates in a growing movement within contemporary continental philosophy. Over the last decade a growing selection of scholars, led by the American philosopher Adrian Johnston, has taken on the task of *systematizing* this philosophy *as its own distinct project*, terming it as 'Transcendental Materialism' ('TM', to differentiate it from more traditional 'dialectical materialisms') (Johnston 2014) – though it is probably traditionally more known as 'Žižekianism', after its adherence to the that Slovenian philosopher's particular synthesis of German Idealist metaphysics, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist political theory. However, this systematisation has now begun to reveal a vibrant theoretical landscape that stretches far beyond the figure of Zizek alone, one which could be characterised by a specific set of shared theoretical concerns and tensions. Some of these characteristics are already explicitly tackled in the literature, others were much more embedded in the philosophical practice itself. This paper concerns a cornerstone example of the latter.

Due to its tripartite influences, TM is a philosophical tradition which has fundamentally always relied on extra-philosophical fields and disciplines for its theoretical production (Johnston 2018), it inevitably "calls for a large interdisciplinary endeavour" (Johnston 2020a). This is reflected one of the most common practices in TM literature, which features the author '*drawing*' on an object of study from outside of philosophical discourse and then using it in conjunction with a theoretical notion. Famous examples might include the entanglements between cybernetics, quantum mechanics and ontology (Zizek 2020), subjectivity and neurology (Johnston and Malabou 2007), psychoanalysis and film theory (McGowan 2007), ethics and literary analysis (Zupančič 2000), etc. – though the practice is even more prevalent in secondary literature and forefront journals. This particular brand of 'TM analysis' has also been identified by 'external' scholarship in the past, which interpreted it as merely being didactic examples,

used to describe philosophical concepts to an otherwise disinterested public (e.g. Keucheyan 2013). TM's interdisciplinary intent was not only ignored entirely, but openly mocked as miscomprehension and/or intellectual arrogance, sometimes with references to Sokal-Bricmont and Dunning-Kruger included (e.g. Bowman 2007, Sluga 2013, Scruton 2017).

These criticisms proved very unproductive due to their fundamental unwillingness to examine the theoretical underpinnings of TM. However, I propose that they, in a very roundabout way, do point to a very real theoretical shortcoming with significant consequences. Building on recent systematisation efforts (Johnston 2020b), I will demonstrate (1) that there is indeed, within TM, an underdeveloped theoretical articulation of what it is its theorists are doing when they 'draw' from these other disciplines and (2) that this lack of articulation can be used to explain other theoretical contentions in the literature, both past and present, which are currently attributed to 'rhetoric' or miscommunication (e.g. the contention in Bordwell 2005). Both claims are structured around the same core challenge, namely that they boil down to the relevancy of the disciplinary 'form' of these objects of analysis – in what respect does drawing from film theory, differ from drawing from neuroscientific research? I hold that this deadlock goes both ways: if TM is incapable of articulating its relationship to another discipline, both fundamentally lose out in the process. To conclude the paper, I will sketch a potential, preliminary response to this challenge inspired by recent developments in Hegelian philosophy of science (such as Gambarotto 2020).