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by Jérôme Game

Les Presses du réel, Dijon, France, 2025

232 pp. Paper, €19.00

ISBN: 978-2-37806-618-8.

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February 2026

In contemporary art, theory and practice are increasingly interwoven. For better or worse, theory and criticism can prove artistically stimulating, but their prestige can also narrow-down artistic practices to offer nothing else than mere illustrations or shallow exemplifications of some theoretical stance, hypothesis or thought-experiment. However, one should not forget that Oulipo, whose initial program was just to produce examples of new or rediscovered abstract formulas constraints, rapidly turned to a more open use of rule-based writing, while other art forms, creatively triggered by theoretical reflection, did not always live up to their expectations (Zola's ideas on the "experimental novel", directly inspired by Claude Bernard's "experimental medicine" hardly resulted in convincing storytelling).

INTR/ANSITIF, a collection of critical and theoretical interventions by French author and multimedia artist Jérôme Game since approximatively 2005, avoids this kind of debate, which repeat in a certain sense the *paragone* discussions of the Renaissance (but instead of asking "is

painting more valuable than sculpture?", for example, one is now asking: "is the final horizon of the artwork theory, or is theory a burden?"). It is instead a good example of "how to do theory" in an era where theory and practice can no longer be separated. The book convincingly demonstrates how theory can be successfully *contaminated* by its encounter with artistic practice, while at the same time maintaining and perhaps even reinforcing its own critical and theoretical potential. Theory, here, is no longer a monolithic and all-encompassing discourse, delivered from a bird's eye point of view. It becomes a way of challenging the homogenizing and standardizing effects of the traditional theoretical master's voice, less by debunking or deconstructing this voice than by involving it in the ongoing creative practices of the artist.

In this book Game has gathered a carefully edited overview of his struggle with the *materiality* of his working tools: words, sounds, images, readings, performances, exhibitions, catalogs, all inextricably intertwined, all making theoretical claims, all equally criticizing the attempts to supersede the opacity of their materials with the help of theoretical generalizations. What *INTR/ANS/TIF* shows is that is possible to invent a theoretical discourse that accompanies and surrounds, but that also absorbs the creative work, to the point that theory itself becomes a mix, yet an *unreconciled* one, of theory and practice.

In the beginning of Game's work is a *failure*: the impossibility to write what the author calls a "sentence" and, thus, to produce a verbal unit or segment that allows him to actually write. First by going beyond the crippling rigidity of linguistic and culturally determined structures, in this case the typically French obsession with "clarity", as disclosed by the rigid rules of grammar, punctuation, style, types of argumentation and the persisting prestige of its own "classic" heritage. Second by moving from sentences to "stories", more precisely to narrative sequences and eventually a novel. Game never managed to write that kind of sentences, all that happened was a "stuttering".

As frequently happens, this failure opened a lot of new avenues, the most important one being the disclosure of the broken field of the (spatiotemporal) *interstice*. The word has, roughly speaking, the same sense in French and in English. The concept, however, looks very "French Theory"-like, and one will find many uses of it in texts by, for instance, Barthes, Lyotard, Deleuze, Derrida, Rancière, etc. Yet Game's take on the interstice is not just theoretical. The concept definitely elucidates what he tries to do in his work, and from that point of view there is no better critic of Game's art than Game himself, but it is also explored and tested within Game's theoretical discourse itself, in varying and sometimes

unpredictable ways (each of the fifteen chapters of the book brings to the fore a different way of practicing the interstice theoretical concept).

For Game, interstice is a two-sided phenomenon. On the one hand, it helps foreground the stubborn presence of any medium's materiality, its resistance to all efforts to pacify this murkiness through the lens of some theoretical *a priori*. On the other hand, it reveals new possibilities to invent works and ways of thinking that both identify and maintain the resistance to any form of theoretical efficiency as well as to any belief in the supreme value of efficiency, that is the belief that a good medium is an invisible medium (for Game, an invisible medium is a dead medium).

All this may seem very abstract, but the twofold structure of failure and interstice help understand the fundamental choices made by Game, for instance why he writes in French, which is not his mother tongue –that would rather be Mexican or English--or why he still considers himself a writer, although his work has become resolutely multimedia--in the interstitial sense of the word: Game does not combine media, he questions which gaps appear when moving from one medium to another. In the former case, the very obstacles raised by the French language, which Game considers inferior to English (English never made him stutter, metaphorically speaking), continue to trigger new forms of writing, probably more than the superior (more elastic, less rigid) verbal structures of English would permit him to invent. In the latter case, the same observation applies: language may seem inferior to the countless opportunities of cinema, which can for instance combine fixity and mobility within a single shot, yet it is the very weakness of language that is the ideal starting point of a critical and open use of an artistic medium, not only within the field of literature, but also in that of cinema, among others. Cinema changes when one tries to move from words to images, and so does photography or the staging of a public reading.

Game's critical self-reflection pushes these barriers even further. The author explains, comments, exposes while at the same time casting new shadows. His voice never speaks alone. Hence, the preference given to the interview form (also to be read in plural: the tone of the book shifts from the almost colloquial to the rather high-brow, both always a little bit of tongue in cheek). Hence, also to refusal to work toward final or definite conclusions as well as the desire to blur the boundaries between the position of the interviewer and that of the interviewee, most clearly shown, but not exclusively, in the various self-interviews, with a nod and a wink to Godard.

INTR/ANSITIF can be read as a highly personal summary of some of the

most important debates of the contemporary art scene, and the book does an excellent job in this regard. Yet its real importance lies elsewhere. It bridges the gap between theory and practice, by producing examples of “creative criticism” that do not abandon their own theoretical ambitions and thus gaining the advantage of keeping a paradoxical distance, obviously another form of interstice, between the work of art and the discourse that aims at disclosing its essence.

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