THESE ARE SITUATIONIST TIMES!
AN INVENTORY OF REPRODUCTIONS,
DEFORMATIONS, MODIFICATIONS,
DERIVATIONS, AND TRANSFORMATIONS

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Ellef Prestsæter
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On the Anti-Situation
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Letter on Topology

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Open Creation and Its Enemies

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Sand Drawings in Malakula and
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These Are Situationist Times!

seeks to place the reader in the overlapping situations of a digital interface (the ST Player) and a printed book (this volume).

The ST Player is an interface that allows readers to explore the entire corpus of The Situationist Times in the company of its editor and publisher, Jacqueline de Jong, who tells the history of the magazine’s creation in a series of video clips. Developed by the Institute for Computational Vandalism (see this volume, 233), the ST Player is available at http://vandal.ist/thesituationisttimes

The physical dimensions of this book are similar to those of the original issues of the magazine. This means that the reproductions of magazine pages are smaller than the originals. The ST Player, on the other hand, lets the reader zoom in and out on the pages at will.

With a few exceptions, contributions to the magazine have not been reproduced in their entirety. For full texts, readers should access the ST Player.

The visual index at the back of the book is meant to aid further explorations across the formats of the online interface, the printed magazines, and this volume. References to the contents of the magazine and the video recordings appear as follows:


ST Player 3:24:11 refers to a point in time 24 minutes and 11 seconds into the video commentary for Issue 3.
ELLEF PRESTSÆTER

INTRODUCTION

The Situationist Times, published by a young girl, Jacqueline de Jong in Paris, appears three times a year and each issue deals with a different specific subject. It is a periodical to experience rather than just read. The last issue, on the theme of labyrinths, includes articles on topology, tarot cards, new music, labyrinthism clarity, prehistoric labyrinths, analytical labyrinths and just labyrinths, in almost every language under the sun including, in impossible, though thoroughly enjoyable, English.

Thus reads the description of the fourth issue of The Situationist Times—the so-called Labyrinth Issue—in the March 1964 bulletin of the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London. Under the heading “Something Different,” the article recommends the magazine for the way in which it differed from other art magazines, “which tend to look extremely alike.” Indeed, The Situationist Times did differ, not only from art magazines, but also, in a programmatic way, from the Internationale situationniste, the official organ of the Situationist International (SI). Throughout its six remarkably diverse issues published in the years 1962–67, The Situationist Times could even be said to have differed from itself, in what retrospectively appears as a continuous process of transformation.

In a letter to Jasia Reichardt, who at the time was assistant director of the ICA and would later curate landmark exhibitions such as Cybernetic Serendipity (1968), De Jong responded with characteristic humor to the mentioning of her magazine in the ICA bulletin. Noting that she was “not at all that young anymore” and that “painting makes people grow old very fast,” De Jong insisted that everything in “the bulletin is quite wrong, only that our English is hilarious” is absolutely right, but we come out when we feel like it and can, practically, and not 3 times a year.”

The letter is characterized by the offbeat, pragmatic orientation necessary for any successful editor of a magazine of this kind, the keen sense for what, at any moment, can be done. For instance, De Jong asks Reichardt if she knows of any printer in the United Kingdom that might accept paintings rather than cash in exchange for their services. The Situationist Times was made from art and by an artist, but it would be misleading to see it as an art magazine in any narrow sense. In its multilingual and transdisciplinary exuberance, as cross-cultural as it was countercultural, The Situationist Times became one of the most exciting and playful magazines of the 1960s. It challenged not only the notion of what it means to be a situationist, but also traditional understandings of culture in the broader sense and of how culture is created, formatted, and shared.

“To publish a magazine is to enter into a heightened relationship with the present moment,” asserts Gwen Allen in her comprehensive study Artists’ Magazines, adding, “Unlike books, which are intended to last for future generations, magazines are decidedly impermanent.” In this respect, too, The Situationist Times differed. It is not just that it had an irregular publishing frequency but also that it aspired to the condition of the book, “intended to last for future generations,” or perhaps more accurately, to that of an archive holding materials for future use. In other words, it was a “magazine” in the sense of storehouse as well. In this respect, it compares in interesting ways to other publishing experiments of the time, such as Daniel Spoerri’s An Anecdoted Topography of Chance (1962/1966), Aspen, “the magazine in a box” (1965–71), and the two paperback “inventories” produced by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore (1967 and 1968).

By saying that The Situationist Times was a storehouse, I don’t mean to imply that it was not a site of contestation, intervention, and expression in its immediate present. A quick glance at the material will confirm that it was. But the magazine proposed a complex understanding of the now that also included longer lineages and a multiplicity of “overlapping situations,” each with its own specific temporal coordinates. As such, it was fully in line with the claim made by the Danish artist Asger Jorn (1914–1974), in a situationist polemic on the understanding of history and action, that “only spatial constructions with durations that stretch from a minute to thousands of years can be situationist instruments.” In this respect, too, there is a strong sense in which the magazine addresses us today as its contemporaries.

1 Jacqueline de Jong, to Jasia Reichardt, n.d., Jacqueline de Jong Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.
3 The Oxford English Dictionary traces the etymology of “magazine” back to the Arabic magazin and majali (storehouses) and (store-up).
4 Originally published in French in 1962, the English “unacknowledged version” is illustrated by Roland Topor (New York: Something Else, 1966). Spoerri and Topor were contributors to Issues 4 and 6 of The Situationist Times, respectively.
Born in 1939, Jacqueline De Jong joined the Situationist International (SI), a revolutionary art movement founded in 1957, when she was in her early twenties. The movement included leading figures such as the French writer and filmmaker Guy Debord (1931–1994), the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920–2005), and Asger Jorn, who became De Jong’s partner. The idea for a magazine appeared in the Internationale situationniste (1960), a publication of the SI in London in September 1960. In the first meeting of this central committee of the SI, which took place in Brussels in November of the same year, it was decided to start publishing a journal called De Jong Times, shaped on every level by the De Jong endeavor, as avant-garde magazines typically do, The Situationist Times (1962–1970; three issues) were co-edited by the French psychiatrist Noël Arnaud (1919–2003), who contributed to a culture of sharing, conceived as a transformative archive.

De Jong, for his part, received the chance to contribute to the magazine as the “De Jong Times.” The spring of 1962 also saw the emergence of Drakabygget, a collective Gruppe SPUR, whose magazine had been brought up on obscenity charges in Germany, and whose nautical collective had been involved in the printing process, and a prolific content producer responsible for the magazine’s remarkable design, deeply interested in the importance of the magazine in the history of situationism and in that of the Labyrinth Issue, De Jong placed the magazine in a lineage of artist’s magazines.

The Situationist Times is an international magazine written by a group of avant-gardists within art and science. The Situationist Times will connect the past and the present with art and search for points of contact between art of all expressions as well as between art and science. In particular by detecting complementary relationships, ambiguity and corresponding tangles of the siêubào, as well as between art and the theory of situationism.

The first two iterations of The Situationist Times were co-edited with the French psychiatrist Noël Arnaud (1919–2003). Both issues dealt extensively with the trial against the Musée-Gruppe SPUR, whose magazine had been brought up on obscenity charges in Germany, and whose members were collectively excluded from the SI in February 1962. When De Jong opposed the measures taken against Gruppe SPUR by the SI, she was forced along with Jorn’s brother Jorgen Nash (1920–2004). Her scathing showdown with Debord and the SI spirals and deviates across eleven handwritten pages of the first issue: “I’m proud that you call us gangsters, nevertheless you are wrong. We are worse; we are situationists.”

To describe Jacqueline de Jong as the editor (and publisher) of The Situationist Times is an understatement, if one by this thinks of someone commissioning contributions, editing and overseeing the publishing venture. De Jong was also responsible for the magazine’s remarkable design, deeply involved in the printing process, and a prolific content provider to an extent not fully reflected in the magazine’s credits and its table of contents. For instance, many of the photos reproduced were taken by her, including the famous one of the signpost in Jardin des Plantes in Paris, stating that “Games are allowed in the labyrinth.” After the inaugurating outburst of issue 1, De Jong’s textual contributions were mostly presented in an unassuming way. Thus, her “Address to U Thant, Secretary General of the United Nations” was published anonymously in Issue 2 (ST 2: 24); in issue 3, “Luxury and Martyrdom” is presented not on its own terms so much as to rectify its abusive detention in Drakabygget nos. 2–3 (ST 3: 91–94); Issue 4 contains a paradoxical mini-essay on a De Jong controversy with the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam hidden in the “Illustration-Index” (ST 4: 149); and in Issue 5 a programmatic statement, almost a manifesto for The Situationist Times, is inserted discretely as an “editor’s note” into the colophon (ST 5: 226).

Finally, and most importantly, De Jong’s work of assembling and putting together the material, in particular the enormous amount of imagery in Issues 3–5, was a creative endeavor that went far beyond the role of editor and designer as traditionally understood. A collaborative project that would have been unthinkable in the SI and the Situationist International (see, for instance, “L’Operation contre-situationniste dans divers pays,” ST 3: 91, 94–95). De Jong’s work of assembling and putting together the material, in particular the enormous amount of imagery in Issues 3–5, was a creative endeavor that went far beyond the role of editor and designer as traditionally understood. A collaborative project that would have been unthinkable in the SI and the Situationist International (see, for instance, “L’Operation contre-situationniste dans divers pays,” ST 3: 91, 94–95).
Some of the more extraordinary pages of the magazine of material are juxtaposed with the most exquisite layouts. The Situationist Times is a site of contestation, perhaps more with the lithographically produced expressivity of Jong’s magazine has a completely different tone and color; organise and display vast numbers of found images. In all issues except number 6, and formats in Issue 2, and the more uniform layout of the issues. Note, for instance, the predominance of handwritten equations, as well as put political programs into practice. To read German, French, Italian, and English, in addition to the experience of engaging with a pinball-esque component. By the experience of engaging with a pinball-esque component.

Elsewhere, De Jong has referred to, a cultural magazine edited by the anarchist Arthur Lehning in Amsterdam from 1927 to 1939, and Jong’s 1987 book Golghorn og lykkehjul: Les Cornes d’or et la roue de la fortune (The Gold Horns and the Wheel of Fortune) was an inspirational in its international and transdisciplinary scope, with contributions from the likes of Kurt Schwitters, Gerrit Rietveld, and Walter Benjamin. Golghorn and lykkehjul provided an example of a publication could be used as a tool to organize and display vast numbers of found images. In terms of its design, however, The Situationist Times differs considerably from other artistic projects of its kind (ST 2: 6, 9). As an alternative site for creative practice and presentations by the Dutch composer Peter Schat (this volume, 25), see the essay by McKenzie Wark in this volume.

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The Sit. Times does not want to prove anything, just show something?

The visual index prepared for this volume gives a striking overview of the magazine and the way it evolved through its issues. Note, for instance, the predominance of handwritten equations, as well as put political programs into practice. To read German, French, Italian, and English, in addition to the experience of engaging with a pinball-esque component.

In their interview with De Jong, there is an intricate interlacing of content; not just one thing after another, but an interweaving of material. Consider, for instance, the way in which a beautiful and unusually airy spread of photographs (ST 4: 22–24) is interspersed in the context of a critical review of “Architect, Do You Van Eyck” (ST 1: 43–45) to the idea of a site of contestation. There is a sense in which this issue as a whole (and by extension the other issues, too) appears as a labyrinthine in which the reader is invited to play. In classical situationist terms, we could think of this other engagement with The Situationist Times as a dérè, not through the “varied ambiances” of a city, but rather through the landscape formed by the readers of the magazine need instruction in this process would be to underestimate them and misconstrue the magazine’s peculiar mode of address. De Jong has always been quite clear on this, stating, “It is up to the reader if he wants so, to make his conclusions.” (ST 2: 22) In this respect, the tracings on transparent paper are —ironically— misreading, with their ready-made solutions and emphasis on getting from point to point in the most effective manner. But the state of order is only provisional. Which is perhaps more suggestive of the actual experience of browsing the magazine is whether or not the reader has succeeded in a”analphabet” reader. Not even De Jong herself would fit the bill, and, of this case, was partly the reason De Jong herself regards the Situationist Times efforts to read German, French, Italian, and English, in addition to the experience of engaging with a pinball-esque component.

It is a fun exercise to imagine the ideal reader of The Situationist Times, which indeed was something to “experience rather than just read.” Such a reader would not only have to read the magazine’s peculiar mode of address. De Jong has always been quite clear on this, stating, “It is up to the reader if he wants so, to make his conclusions.” (ST 2: 22) In this respect, the tracings on transparent paper are —ironically— misreading, with their ready-made solutions and emphasis on getting from point to point in the most effective manner. But the state of order is only provisional. Which is perhaps more suggestive of the actual experience of browsing the magazine is whether or not the reader has succeeded in a”analphabet” reader. Not even De Jong herself would fit the bill, and, of this case, was partly the reason De Jong herself regards the Situationist Times efforts to read German, French, Italian, and English, in addition to the experience of engaging with a pinball-esque component.

surprising rediscovery of the Pinball Issue got us involved with Hans Brinkman, whose company and contributions have been vurrukkuluk—delightful—through and through. Our deep gratitude extends to the great number of people who have contributed in other ways to the publication. A special thanks is due to Øivind Möller Bakken for taking all the photos for the digital interface and the book, and for coping heroically with our endless photo requests. Designer Malin Kleiva did invaluable work throughout the three years we have been developing the project: Malmö Konsthall (Mats Stjernstedt, Anna Kindvall, Erik Mårtensson, and Peter Westenberg).

Our deep gratitude extends to the great number of people who have been involved in getting the whole enterprise off the ground. We would also like to thank the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and Margriet Schavemaker for inviting us to present the project there. Curator Kevin Repp and the staff at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University graciously facilitated our research in the Jacqueline de Jong Papers and helped produce excellent reproductions of its holdings. Oslo Pinball Club provided us with electro-mechanical pinball machines, including a defunct Merry Widow (1963) and a fully operative Big Valley (1979). Generous support from Nordic Culture Point, the Mondriaan Fund, Arts Council Norway, and the Nordic Culture Fund made it possible for us to carry out the project with the level of ambition we believed the material called for. Among other things, this funding allowed us certain luxuries Jacqueline never had, including that of professional copyeditors (thank you, Jaclyn Arndt) and proofreaders.

It is customary to acknowledge the valuable input of the early readers of a manuscript while taking full responsibility for the errors and shortcomings in the printed results. We hereby do precisely that—the errors are fully our own. And in the spirit of Jacqueline, who once noted that “misunderstandings and contradictions are not only of an extreme value but in fact the basis of all art and creation,” we would like to share them with you. It is up to you, the reader, if you should want to do so, to make your own conclusions.

Dear Mr. Welling,

Thank you very much for your letter. I will try to answer your questions in due order, although it offends me a little bit, since I do not have a teacher’s mentality. Like you say, the energy which I have put into the magazine I exclusively put into painting at the moment. Tant pis: since you still have the honor of being the only paper that wants to write something about it, I will well-behavedly perform the task of explaining, in so far that this is possible at all.

Accompanying this letter I will send you a cover, made for bookstores, which explains in the plainest possible terms what the magazine is about. This cover—which was printed in Denmark, just like the latest issue of the magazine, since I can pay there with paintings, which is not possible in the Netherlands, so that we were always short of money—will be sent in the catalogue of books which are published by the National Museum, Copenhagen (the archaeological museum). This means that it will be part of the catalogue. Imagine that Cobra would have been sent by the Musée de l’Homme (do we have a central archaeological museum in the Netherlands?).

Hitherto (until no. 4) the delivery was achieved entirely without any system, as a Service de Presse for the people that we (the contributors) knew or who asked for it, that’s all. Apart from that I went to some bookstores to sell something, usually with success, but when I travelled everything went away. That is what happens with an avant-garde magazine.

In Denmark I experienced some difficulties with the printer. I became angry and decided to look for a distributor or publisher. Since I worked very hard, but nobody took me seriously, I had to find an authority, preferably a Danish one. Completely by chance and thanks to friends I found a publisher who was responsible for the books of the National Museum and the university, and wanted to have something avant-garde-like. After some discussions they took the magazine, which caused a perfect revolution in the activities of the printers. It actually appeared from now on Rhodos delivers to anything Scandinavian, and more or less performs the Service de Presse. I only take charge of the Parisian bookstores and perform my own Service de Presse, which means that everything is much better organized now. Subscriptions are not possible, since I only publish separate issues when it is financially possible (which means that we will have to find a printer which is willing to take artworks in return!) and when I feel like it. There is enough material, but it takes an enormous amount of time and energy. So no subscriptions.

It all started in May 1962, and the first three issues have been printed in Hengelo, in the most primitive and cheap fashion possible, on an offset-press. I started because I was angry and finally wanted to come out in the open with my views, after—as the Dutch section of the Internationale Situationniste—having agreed with everything for two years in a row and never having said anything; after all, I was the youngest and rather stupid, had much to learn and was mainly listening. In the first issue I declared how necessary it was for me to protest: in my view the IS was an anti-organization and not a school of the avant-garde, i.e. not an institution. With anti-organization I meant that everyone who was creative, n’importe in which institution. With anti-organization I meant that everyone who was creative, n’importe in which

Paris, the 8th of February, 1964

Hans Haacke, a small group—among others Debord—had split off and confronted us—the Scandinavian and Dutch sections—with a printed fait accompli, this exclusion of Spur (5 people), which I have put into the magazine I exclusively put into painting at the moment. Tant pis: since you still have the honor of being the only paper that wants to write something about it, I will well-behavedly perform the task of explaining, in so far that this is possible at all.

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