

# The Guardian of the Avant-Garde: Jacqueline de Jong

## Frida Sandström

Refusing exclusion, eighty-year-old Situationist Jacqueline de Jong holds onto the avant-garde. Post-1968 and post-internet, her agonistic understanding of artistic and political practice is still urgent. In times of crisis, the artist and thinker détourns time itself and enables an anachronistic worldview of alliances between fields and disciplines.

The last time I met Jacqueline de Jong was at the opening of *The Most Dangerous Game* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin last year. Highlighting the legacy of Guy Debord and his library of pamphlets, journals, and correspondence, the exhibition was curated according to Debord's exclusion of visual arts and artists from the Situationist International from 1962 onward.

Throughout the exhibition, curved vitrines containing fifty years of textual matter traced the heyday of the Situationist era (1957-1972). Struggling to read the small letters through the light-reflecting vitrines, I bumped into de Jong. Soon they'll invite her to say something, I thought. She was the only person from the movement present in the gallery, and I was curious to hear her account. I waited in vain. De Jong was not presented. Neither was she asked to introduce the part of the exhibition she had authored, the English-language *Situationist Times* (*ST*).

I had to return to Sweden and to the exhibition *The Situationist Times: Same Player Shoots Again!* at Malmö Konsthall (2018-2019) to get a proper introduction to her oeuvre, including her contribution to the Situationist International, the experimental editorial practice behind *ST*, and her career as an autodidact painter.

What's distinctive about de Jong is her insistence. Indifferent to the changing movements around her and to the structural overlooking of women members of the Situationist International, she has continued to paint; at the age of eighty, she is still active. In February she opened the exhibition *Pinball Wizard: The Work and Life of Jacqueline de Jong* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Giving an account of de Jong's legacy as an artist and a thinker, the exhibition includes the beginning of her career at the very same museum (1958-1960). As an assistant in the applied arts section, she met Asger Jorn, who would become her companion for a decade. He introduced her to the Situationist International, a movement she would follow longer than any lover.

At the age of nineteen, de Jong joined a council meeting as a listener and soon became an active member. Simultaneously, conflict in the movement was growing, ending with the exclusion of the Dutch group SPUR in 1962 and later of de Jong herself. She had proposed an English-language version of the text-heavy *International Situationist* (*IS*) but decided to reformulate its editorial aim, changing it to "a platform to respond to the eviction of the artists"<sup>1</sup> and moving the journal away from the theoretical discourses that dominated *IS*.

*ST*<sup>2</sup> was born out of the urge to include experimental matters by artists and as art. Everyone "who develops theoretically or practically this new unity is automatically a member of the Situationist International," argued de Jong, refusing to outline any programmatic or theoretical statement about her journal. Readers had to draw

"their own conclusions."<sup>3</sup> This is exactly the development that Debord stopped in 1962, putting an end to what is often called "the last avant-garde." For these reasons, retrospectives such as the Stedelijk's are important, showing de Jong's highly innovative expressionist painting and writing and also depicting her as a political thinker. The avant-garde is not history but a clearly present fact.

Six issues of *ST* were published; the journal ended with the breakup of de Jong and Jorn (who had financed it by selling paintings). *ST*'s editorial practice poses many questions about what a cultural journal could be. Through her topological understanding of two-dimensional printed matter, de Jong enabled dialogues between institutionalized fields. Perhaps disagreements between fields is a better way to put it, as frictions were the main aesthetics of *ST*. In her essay in the first issue, "Critique on the Political Practice of Détournement,"<sup>4</sup> de Jong argues that "Misunderstandings and contradictions are not only of an extreme value but in fact the basis of all art and creation."<sup>5</sup> The essay was a direct response to Debord's attempt to *organize* the very anarchic SI by excluding artists. De Jong argued that Debord had thus détourned the movement itself: "The Situationistic notion cannot be on art it is an ideological and elaborative development," she wrote in a colloquial language where all sentences float into one. According to her it was a paradox to formalize "an organization which has absolutely no rules."<sup>6</sup> The agonism in de Jong's politics and aesthetics was clear. It still is. The seventh issue of *ST*—dedicated to the topology of pinball, the machine and the game—was never printed. It is still a collection of editorial fragments, portions of a formless whole. But the process is not on hold; rather, it is up to readers to *disorganize* the parts as they like. Even a proper ending is détourned by de Jong, and it surely will continue as such.

1 Christophe Bourseiller, "Les temps situationniste, entretien avec Jacqueline de Jong", in *Archives et documents situationnistes* (Paris: Denoël, 2001), 30. Cited in Karen Kurczynski, "Red Herrings: Eccentric Morphologies in the *Situationist Times*," in *Expect Anything Fear Nothing: The Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere*, ed. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen (Copenhagen: Nebula; New York: Autnomedia, 2011), 131.

2 See [https://monoskop.org/Situationist\\_Times](https://monoskop.org/Situationist_Times).

3 Kurczynski, 132.

4 See <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/digdeeper/critic-political-practice-detournement>.

5 Kurczynski, 141.

6 Ivi.

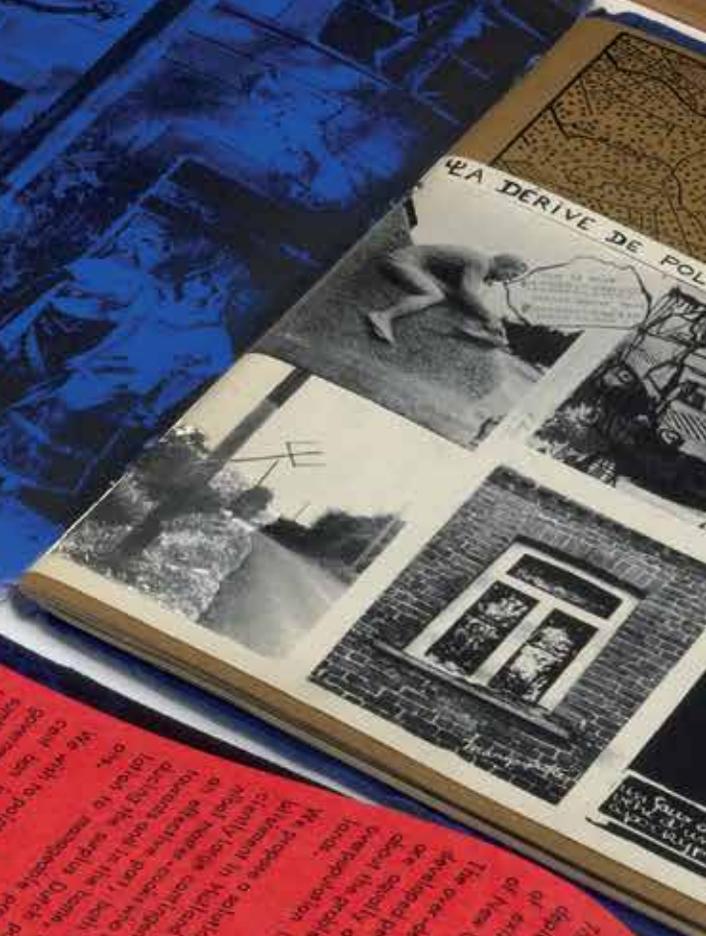
71 *Pinball Wizard: The Work and Life of Jacqueline de Jong* installation view at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2019. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij

72 Photography for *The Situationist Times*, no. 7. Original photography by Hans Brinkman, ca. early 1970s

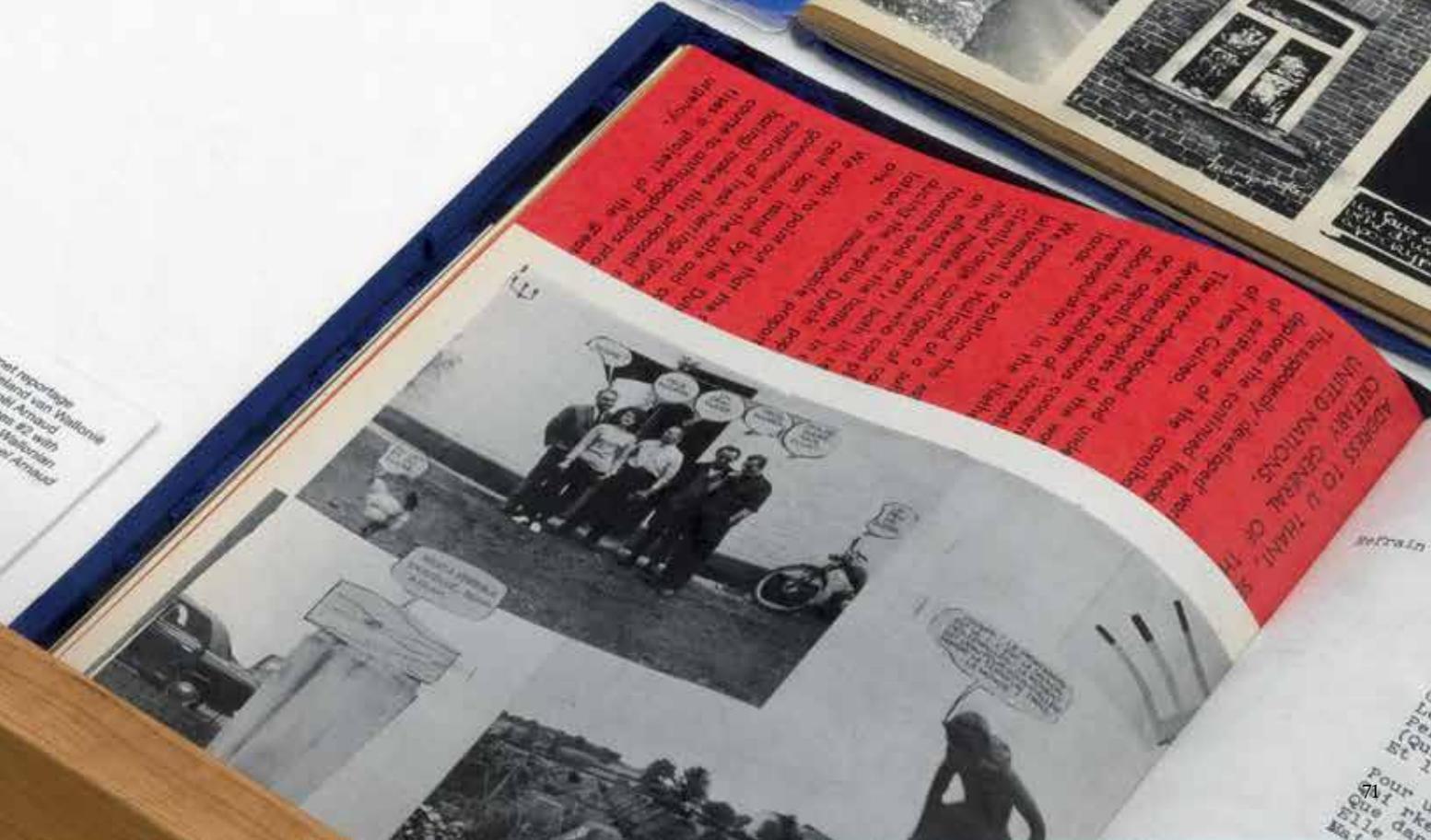
73 Jacqueline de Jong, *The Situationist Times*, no. 5, International Edition, Paris, 1964. Courtesy: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam



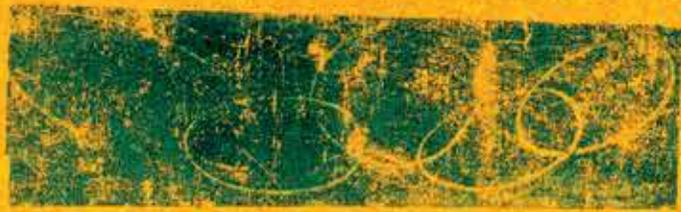
The Situationist Times #12 editor provided some of the background for the essay 'The Situationist Times #12: also evidence in the psychology of the text'.



The Situationist Times #12: most reportage van een derieve door het plateland van Wladimir de Jong. Serge Mavrouk, Noël Arnaud or De Jong / The Situationist Times #12 with a reportage o/a derieve through the Wobsonen by Serge Mavrouk, Noël Arnaud (De Jong, a.o.)



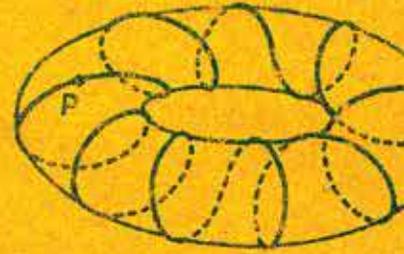




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