

Extract from **Internationale Situationniste at Context XXI**

(http://contextxxi.org/die-welt-als-labyrinth.html)

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Die Welt als Labyrinth

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SITUATIONISTISCHE INTERNATIONALE

In 1959 the situationists joined forces with the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam to organize a general manifestation, both drawing on the museum site itself and going beyond its framework. This entailed transforming rooms 36 and 37 into a labyrinth, at the same time as three days of systematic *dérive* were to be undertaken by three situationist teams operating simultaneously in the central area of Amsterdam conurbation. A more conventional supplement to these basic activities was to consist of an exhibition of certain documents, along with permanent taped lectures, relayed continuously, and only changed at the end of every twenty-four hours. The execution of this plan, finally decided on 30 May 1960, called for the reinforcement of the Dutch Situationists by a dozen of their foreign comrades.

On 5 March the director of the Stedelijk Museum, W.J.H.B. Sandberg, approved the definitive plan while revealing two sudden reservations: 1) the Amsterdam Fire Brigade would be called to give their approval of certain potentially dangerous aspects of the labyrinth; 2) a part of the resources necessary for the construction would not be supplied by the museum but by external organizations — notably a *Prince Bernhard Foundation* — to whom the S.I. would have to make direct appeal. Beyond the comic aspect of the first and the air of compromise of the second, the same obstacle could be glimpsed: by the direction of the Stedelijk Museum adopting a partly irresponsible attitude, third parties would be given to judge in our

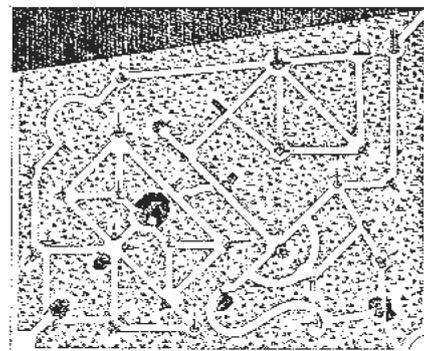
place, and without appeal, on the necessary character of such and such a detail of our construction. And this precisely when the nature of the undertaking called for the accumulation of many unusual processes to make a leap ahead in a new type of manifestation. In addition, the work having to begin *in situ*, and restrictions perhaps being introduced at any moment in its elaboration, to go on under these conditions would have meant underwriting the falsification of our project in advance.

Himself party to the refusal, Asger Jorn succinctly set out, at the Situationist meeting held the same day in Amsterdam, and which was to come to an immediate indecision, the overall conditions:

Sandberg precisely represented that cultural reformism which, linked to politics, has come to power everywhere in Europe since 1945. These people have been the ideal managers of culture within the existing framework. To this end they have favored, to the hilt, minor modernists and the enfeebled young followers of the modernism of 1920-1930. They have been able to do nothing for true innovators. Currently, threatened on all sides by a counter-offensive of avowed reactionaries (see, since then, the attacks of the Belgian Senate on 10 May on official support for “abstract” painting), they were trying to radicalize themselves at the precise moment they were caving in. Sandberg, for example, had been violently attacked, two days before, in the Amsterdam municipal council by Christians who want to bring back figurative art (cf. the *Algemeen Handelsblad* of 4 March). His succession to the Stedelijk Museum could be considered an open question.

Jorn considered, however, that he had had the possibility of choosing which side he wanted to be on:

Sandberg in the labyrinth, along with us, would have been able to find himself or to lose himself. But the ineffectual search for compromises to safeguard his past efforts prevented him from falling in with good company. Sandberg dared not break with the *avant-garde*, but neither dared he assure the conditions which were the only ones acceptable to a real *avant-garde*.



At the end of Jorn's report the meeting ended unanimously with the S.I.'s refusal to be involved, a refusal transmitted in writing on 7 March. It permitted only those of its members who thought it useful, to profit individually from Sandberg's good will: as Pinot-Gallizio did in exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, in June, of his industrial painting, already shown in Paris last year.

The labyrinth, whose plan had been established by the Dutch section of the S.I., assisted on some points by Debord, Jorn, Wyckaert and Zimmer, presents itself as a circuit which can vary, theoretically, from 200 meters to 3 kilometers. The ceiling, sometimes 5 meters high

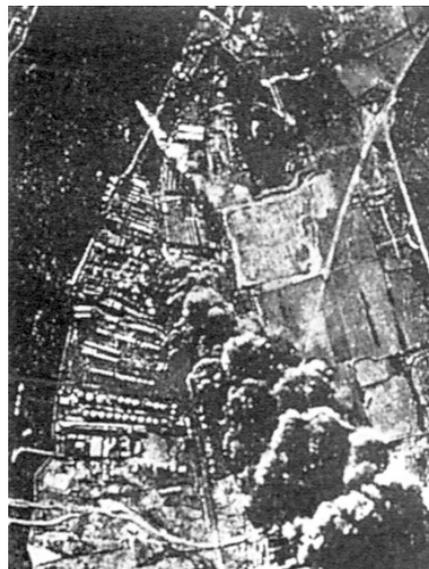
(white section of the plan), sometimes 2.44 meters (grey section), may drop in certain places to 1.22 meters. Its fitting out involves neither interior decoration of some kind nor a reduced reproduction of urban ambience, but tends to form a mixed environment, never seen before, through the mélange of interior characteristics (furnished apartment) and exterior (urban) ones. To do this it brings into play artificial rain and fog, and wind. Passage through the adapted thermal and luminous zones, the sound interventions (noises and speech controlled by a battery of tape-recorders), and a certain number of conceptual and other provocations, is determined by a system of unilateral doors (visible or openable from one side only) as well as by the greater or lesser attractiveness of individual locations; this ends up increasing the occasions for getting lost. Among the pure obstacles we may cite Gallizio's tunnel of industrial painting and the detoured hoardings of Wyckaert.



Plan der Strukturen des nicht eingerichteten Labyrinths.

The operational *dérive* around Amsterdam must be related to the micro-*dérive* organized in this concentrated labyrinth. Two groups, each containing three situationists, would *dérive* for three days, on foot or eventually by boat (sleeping in hotels along the way) without leaving the center of Amsterdam. By means of the walkie-talkies with which they would be equipped, these groups would remain in contact,

with each other, if possible, and in any case with the radio-truck of the cartographic team, from where the director of the *dérive* — in this case Constant — moving around so as to maintain contact, would define their routes and sometimes give instructions (it was also the director of the *dérive*'s responsibility to prepare experiments at certain locations and secretly arranged events).



If it was accompanied by the surveys of the terrain to be interpreted later during the workings of unitary urbanism, and if it was to have a certain theatrical aspect through its effect on the public, this *dérive* operation was fundamentally intended to actualize a new game. And the S.I. had had to go against economic custom in writing into the manifestation's budget an individual salary of 50 florins per day of *dérive*.

It is only the conjunction of these two operations which is capable of revealing their new nature. The S.I., then, did not consider that the *dérive* on its own, which could have been maintained in

Amsterdam, would have been sufficiently meaningful. Likewise, it is not desirable to build the labyrinth in the museum of a certain German town which is unsuitable to the *dérive*. Furthermore, the very fact of utilizing a museum brings with it a particular pressure, and the west face of the Amsterdam labyrinth was a wall specially constructed in the guise of an entrance to breach this: that hole in the wall had been requested by our German section as a guarantee of non-submission to the logic of the museum. The S.I. has also adopted, in April, a plan by Wyckaert profoundly modifying the use of the labyrinth studied for Amsterdam. The labyrinth shall not be built inside another building but, with greater flexibility and in direct relation to urban realities, on well-situated wasteland in a selected city, so as to become the setting off point for *dérives*.

Situationist International: Situationistisch / Situationist: All das, was sich auf die Theorie oder auf die praktische Tätigkeit von Situationen bezieht. Derjenige, der sich damit beschäftigt, Situationen zu konstruieren. Mitglied der situationistischen Internationale.

Situationismus: Sinnloses Wort, missbräuchlich durch Ableitung des vorigen gebildet. Einen Situationismus gibt es nicht — was eine Doktrin zur Interpretation der vorhandenen Tatsachen bedeuten würde. Selbstverständlich haben sich die Anti-Situationisten den Begriff „Situationismus“ ausgedacht.

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