

Two or Three Things I Heard About Provo

An impromptu soundtrack for W139, compiled and constructed by Experimental Jetset (2011).

PAMPHLET 7

**Two or Three Things I Heard About Provo**

The sheet you are holding in your hands right now (or are looking at on a computer) is published as the accompanying text to a radio show taking place on Monday February 28, 2011, between 18:00 and 19:00 hrs. (Central European Time), broadcasted by Red Light Radio. The radio show is part of ‘Two or Three Things I Know About Provo’, an exhibition that runs from February 18 to March 13, 2011, at Amsterdam art space W139.

‘Two or Three Things I Know About Provo’ is a small, personal (and ultimately incomplete) archive of the Provo movement in Amsterdam (1965–1967), as well as a selection of documents related to various post-Provo activities (most notably Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt, 1967–1976), with a particular focus on the role of activist and printer Rob Stolk (1946–2001) in these movements. Intended as an impromptu installation, it was compiled and constructed by Experimental Jetset for W139.

SIDE A+B

The radio show you are listening to right now is meant as a auditive addition to the exhibition. Just as the installation at W139 is a posterwall of printed matter, we see this radio show as a posterwall of sound. A subjective and improvised archive of overlapping fragments, related to both the Provo and post-Provo movements. Whereas the printed matter displayed in the exhibition is all directly linked to Rob Stolk (he was a printer, after all), the tracks that make up this radio show are related to Rob in a much looser way. However, we do believe that it is the figure of Rob Stolk that holds all these fragments together.

Rob’s activism was very much shaped by the notion of the ‘free press’, and this was the subject we tried to explore in our installation at W139. We are glad that we now have a chance, however briefly, to look into a related subject: that of ‘free radio’. We like to thank W139 and Red Light Radio for the airtime.

An integral part of the installation is a series of seven printed pamphlets (numbered 0 to 6), that are distributed for free to the visitors of the show. Double-sided, A3-sized (and then folded to 105 x 297 mm), these pamphlets contain explanations, captions, credits and interviews. This document has been designed to fit into this series of pamphlets, that’s why it is numbered ‘Pamphlet 7’. We do think that this radio show can only be understood within the context of the actual installation at W139, and in relationship to the seven previous pamphlets. That’s why we urge you to go to W139 before the exhibition is over (if you haven’t seen it yet, that is).

Tracklist:**Side A: Provo (1965–1967)**

01. On Escalation (excerpt/edit) – Peter Schat
02. Report from 10 March, 1966
03. Litany for the 14th of June, 1966 (excerpt) – Willem Breuker / Orkest 66
04. Attentie (excerpt)
05. Dances from the Labyrinth (excerpt) – Peter Schat
06. Report from 10 March, 1966
07. On Escalation (excerpt) – Peter Schat
08. Provo in Frascati, 1966
09. Litany for the 14th of June, 1966 (excerpt) – Willem Breuker / Orkest 66
10. Jan Wolkers, 19 March, 1966
11. Life is Music is Love is All (excerpt) – Willem Breuker / Orkest 66
12. Report from Granada television, 1966 (Robert Jasper Grootveld)
13. Links de Kinks – Peter J. Muller
14. Provo-meisjes (excerpt) – Jasperina de Jong and Maria Lindes
15. Attentie (excerpt)
16. Happening (Robert Jasper Grootveld)
17. Litany for the 14th of June, 1966 (excerpt) – Willem Breuker / Orkest 66
18. Attentie (excerpt)
19. My White Bicycle – Tomorrow
20. Provo in Frascati, 1966
21. The Aleph (excerpt) – Peter Schat
22. Happening (Robert Jasper Grootveld)
23. Liquidation of the Provo Organisation, 1967
24. Zo is het toevallig ook nog eens een keer – Selfkick & a choir of Provos

Side B: Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt, etc. (1967–1976)

25. Report from the occupied Maagdenhuis, 1969
26. Dat gebeurt in Vietnam – De Volharding
27. C.Q. – The Outsiders
28. Radio Mokum station call
29. De Trein van A naar Z (excerpt) – Steef Davidson & OAAO
30. Radio Sirene / Gerard van den Berg, 1971
31. De Trein van A naar Z – Steef Davidson & OAAO
32. Radio Mokum, 1975
33. S.O.S. (excerpt) – Het
34. Radio Mokum, 1974
35. Lied van de Macht van het Volk – De Volharding
36. Radio Mokum, 1975
36. De Afbraak (excerpt) – Muziekgroep de Erepijs
37. Radio Sirene / Gerard van den Berg
38. De Afbraak (edit) – Muziekgroep de Erepijs
39. Radio Mokum, 1975
40. Solidariteitslied – De Volharding
41. S.O.S. (excerpt) – Het

We start off with a fragment of Peter Schat’s ‘On Escalation’ (**tracks 01 and 07**). Schat (1935 – 2003) was a renowned Dutch modern composer. He was also a tireless supporter of Provo. In fact, for much of 1966, the headquarters and printing press of Provo were housed in Schat’s basement.

Featured (as **tracks 05 & 21**) are also excerpts from Peter Schat’s ‘Labyrinth’, composed for the Holland Festival and premiered at Carré on June 23, 1966 (accompanied by riots and smoke-bombs). In his liner notes to ‘Labyrinth’ (titled ‘The End of Savagery’), Peter Schat mentions the strong ties between Provo and ‘Labyrinth’. Similarly, in his novel ‘Bericht aan de Rattenkoning’, Dutch writer Harry Mulisch describes ‘Labyrinth’ as an “anarchistic Gesamtkunstwerk of music, theatre, film, dance, acrobatics and Dada, a clear extension of the labyrinth of Amsterdam”. In fact, Mulisch’s description of ‘Labyrinth’ can be seen as a definition of Provo as well (especially when one takes into consideration Provo’s strong psycho-geographical ties to the city of Amsterdam, its emphasis on happenings, and its Dadaist influences).

Another modern composer (and jazz musician, and free improviser) inspired by Provo was Willem Breuker (1944–2010), band leader of the famous Willem Breuker Kollektief. What we play now is a fragment of ‘Litany for the 14th of June 1966’ (**tracks 03, 09 and 17**), a piece from Breuker’s debut album ‘Contemporary Jazz for Holland’ (1966) together with Orkest 66. The title of the piece specifically refers to the riots of 1966, when construction workers attacked the building of De Telegraaf, a Dutch right-wing populist newspaper, after De Telegraaf falsely blamed protesting construction workers for the death of one of the workers. Although the Provos were just one of the groups involved in these riots, it remains an important date within Provo history. On a more personal note: as marching band, the Willem Breuker Kollektief played during the funeral procession of Rob Stolk, in 2001.

Provo introduces itself in a fragment from ‘Attentie’ (**tracks 04 and 18**), a television program broadcasted by NCRV (August 17, 1965). This particular TV show featured an item in which a group of five Provos are interviewed (Rob Stolk, Garnt Kroeze, Hans Korteweg, Janhuib Blans and Maarten Visser), filmed in front of the statue of Domela Nieuwenhuis (on the Nassauplein). Elsewhere in the mix, we hear fragments (**tracks 02 and 06**) of a radio program reporting about the Provo riots during the wedding procession of Princess Beatrix and Prince Claus, on March 10, 1966. In ‘Imaazje! De Verbeelding van Provo’ (Uitgeverij Wereldbibliotheek, 2003), researcher Niek Pas extensively describes the way in which these riots have been covered by TV, radio and newspapers.

An important part of Provo were obviously the ‘happenings’ of Robert Jasper Grootveld (1932–2009), public performances that took place every Saturday night around Het Lieverdje, the statue on the Spui square in Amsterdam. **Track 16** captures one of these happenings.

At a certain point, the center of these happenings shifted from ‘t Spui to Frascati, a theatre at the Nes, a street near the Dam square. These events took place at the usual Saturday nights, in the months of September and October in 1966. As Niek Pas describes in ‘Imaazje!’, these performances were well-attended, resulting in riotous back-and-forth processions between the Nes and the Dam. What you hear here (**tracks 08 and 20**) are short snippets of tape, documenting these Frascati happenings. The full cassette can be found in the archive of the International Institute of Social History (IISG).

On **track 14**, we hear Lurelei, a Dutch cabaret group, doing ‘Provo Meisjes’ (‘Provo Girls’), a song that appeared as a 7" single in 1966. The vocals are by Jasperina de Jong and Maria Lindes (the Provo theme was continued on the flipside, with a song called ‘Happening Hein’ performed by John Lanting).

The Provo movement being a real hype in those years, it is only logical that cabaret groups (such as Lurelei) and satirical TV shows (such as ‘Zo Is Het Toevallig Ook Nog Eens Een Keer’) took full advantage of the Provo phenomenon. Come to think of it, it would be unfair to classify these songs and sketches automatically as exploitation (or ‘Provoexploitation’). The fact is, a lot of these chansonniers and cabaraters were quite sympathetic towards the Provo movement, and, each in their own way, did their part in shaking up the Dutch cultural landscape.

Case in point is Mies Bouman, around that time a popular Dutch mainstream TV presenter, and regular contributor to ‘Zo Is Het Toevallig Ook Nog Eens Een Keer’, a satirical TV show broadcasted by the VARA. For her talkshow, called ‘Mies-en-Scene’, she interviewed Rob Stolk in 1966, resulting in a very interesting conversation. However, thanks to her sympathy towards Provo, as well as for her contributions to ‘Zo Is Het Toevallig Ook Nog Eens Een Keer’, she received huge amounts of hate mail, and even had to be protected by the police at one point. Later in the mix, we added the opening song of ‘Zo Is Het Toevallig Ook Nog Eens Een Keer’ (**track 24**), not the official TV tune, but a rare 1966 freakbeat version performed by The Selfkick (not to be

confused with Dutch beat poet Johnny the Selfkicker), accompanied by “a choir of Provos”, or at least, that’s what the 7" sleeve says.

Staying within beat territory, we jump to **track 19**. Inspired by the Provo movement, London psych/mod band Tomorrow recorded ‘My White Bicycle’ in 1967; a clear reference to Provo’s White Bike Plan. After the drummer of the band received a Provo badge (given to him by the owner of famous London boutique ‘Granny Takes a Trip’), the band decides to travel to Amsterdam to study the Provo movement in more detail. After their stay in Amsterdam, they recorded ‘My White Bicycle’.

(Earlier, in 1966, Tomorrow contributed to the soundtrack of Antonioni’s ‘Blow-Up’, a movie that coincidentally seems to encapsulate one of Provo’s main themes: the blowing up of images, in both senses of the word – enlarging and destroying. But this is just a side-note).

Track 24 documents the official end of Provo. On May 13th, 1967, during a tumultuous happening at the Speakers’ Corner in the Vondelpark, the movement liquidated itself in an act of ‘auto-provocation’. TV footage of this event shows a public meeting in which every speaker seems to say exactly the opposite of what they mean. Arch-enemies (such as mayor Van Hall) are being described as best friends, Van Heutsz is elevated to an actual movement (‘Van Heutszism’), and speakers worry openly about Provo mass-unemployment, during a theatre-like performance of irony and wordplay.

After the self-liquidation of Provo in 1967, Rob Stolk became involved in several other fields of activism, most notably the so-called ‘Maagdenhuisbezetting’ (the students’ occupation of the administrative building of the University of Amsterdam, in 1969), Woningburo de Kraker and the Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt (the loose collective of action committees that, between 1967 and 1976, were trying to put a halt to the city council’s plans to demolish the Nieuwmarkt in Amsterdam, as well as other areas).

Featured in this mix we hear fragments of free (independent, illegal) radio stations (so-called ‘pirates’), strongly affiliated with these actions. First, there’s Radio De Vrije Maagd, the station broadcasting from the occupied Maagdenhuis. And then there’s Radio Sirene (**tracks 30 and 37**) and Radio Mokum (**tracks 28, 32, 34, 36 and 39**), two stations that were strongly linked to the Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt period. (More about these radio stations can be found in the archive of the IISG).

In 1969, Rob Stolk was actually operating a printing press from within the occupied Maagdenhuis building. A well-known poster he designed and printed around that time was the one announcing Radio De Vrije Maagd: “Citizens of Amsterdam! Don’t listen to the capitalist-collaborating mainstream radio. Listen to De Vrije Maagd instead!”. An image of this poster is included on the back of this pamphlet.

A slight return to Willem Breuker. In 1972, Louis Andriessen (yet another renowned Dutch modern composer) started, together with Willem Breuker and a couple of other musicians (coming from the fields of jazz and modern composition), an ensemble called Orkest De Volharding (‘The Endurance’). This collective performed during political rallies, demonstrations, strikes and local actions. Although not linked to Provo in the strict sense, you can certainly feel the spirit of post-Provo here (**tracks 26, 35, 40**). In fact, in the archive of the IISG, De Volharding is described as an ‘action committee, affiliated with Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt’.

Another important figure is Steef Davidson (1943–2010), artist, activist and archivist, and close friend to Rob Stolk. He was involved in collectives and committees such as Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt, De Vrije Zeeafdrukker, De Tand des Tijds; he was also a renowned expert on the subject of political posters. In this mix, we included two of his poetry performances (**tracks 29 and 31**).

We also added a couple of Dutch beat songs by The Outsiders and Het (**tracks 27 and 41**). These tunes are included solely to provide some sort of historical backdrop; although Rob liked beat music, as a teenager he was more into modern jazz.

As a matter of fact, even before he published ‘Barst’ (‘Crack’), his first anarchist magazine, Rob ran a jazzclub in Zaandam, together with his friend Jaap de Jong, inviting people like Pieter Boersma, Willem Breuker and Johnny van Doorn. And as it happens, one of the founders of Red Light Radio is the son of Jaap de Jong (yes, we’re talking about you, Orpheu de Jong). And so, the past and the present come together once again, like radio waves crossing each other in mid-ether.

For more information, see www.experimentaljetset.nl/provo

AMSTERDAM



MEERS

**LUISTER NIET
NAAR DE MET
HET KAPITAAL
KOLLABORERENDE
Hilversumse radio, maar
naar de vrye maagd.
225 mtr middengolf
KOM NAAR HET SPUI
BELEGER DE BELLEGERAARS!**