

Two or Three Things I Know About Provo
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Online archive on the subject of the Provo movement (1965–1967) and post-Provo activity (1967–onwards).

by Experimental Jetset

10 Maart: Dag van de Anarchie
March 10: Day of Anarchy

Poster (one-sided, mimeographed, 33.8 x 21.4 cm) to announce the protests against the royal wedding procession of Princess Beatrix and Claus von Amsberg, taking place in Amsterdam, on March 10, 1966. Most copies of this poster were distributed as folded pamphlets, inserted in issue 7 of *Provo* magazine (February, 1966).

Although the poster is unsigned, in 'Een Teken aan de Wand: Album van de Nederlandse Samenleving, 1963–1983' (Promotheus, 1983) the design of the poster is attributed to Provo-affiliated cartoonist Willem (Bernard Willem Holtrop, born 1941).

The mirrored letter A obviously (and perfectly) symbolizes the notion of anarchy – but it's not hard to see, in the mirrored A, also a reflection of the notion of printing itself. After all, most techniques of printing (whether it's mimeograph, letterpress, offprint, or screen-print) involve processes in which images are either mirrored, turned upside-down or made negative. In that sense, this poster also represents the contrarian nature of printing itself: the idea that positive results can often only be achieved through negative actions.



ARTZINES



10-3-66 (part 1)

Following the Provo-related protests that took place during the royal wedding procession of March 10, 1966, a small exhibition was installed at the space of publisher Polak & Van Gennep (at that time situated at Prinsengracht 820, Amsterdam) – an exhibition featuring photos documenting the police brutality that took place during the protests of March 10.

This exhibition, co-organized by Provo (in collaboration with the magazines *Propria Cures*, *Links* and *Yang*) opened on March 19 (only nine days after the protests) with a legendary speech by the Dutch writer Jan Wolkers. Surely enough, the opening of the exhibition itself turned into a stage for police brutality; an event famously captured by Dutch avant-garde filmmaker Louis van Gasteren, in his short movie 'Omdat Mijn Fiets Daar Stond' (1966).

Shortly after the exhibition, an accompanying catalogue appeared. Edited by Rob Stolk and Christoph Hahn, the oblong booklet (A4-sized, black & white, offset-printed, 40 pages, bound with red tape and staples) featured photographs by Cor Jaring, Ed van der Elsken, Koen Wessing and G.J. (Gerrit Jan) Wolffensperger.

The catalogue was published in 1966 by De Parel van de Jordaan (the self-proclaimed 'Oranje Komitee' of the Provo movement), in which Rob Stolk played a central role – alongside other prominent Provo members, such as Peter Brinkhorst and Hans Tuynman. Obviously, the designation 'Oranje Komitee' (which roughly translates as 'Royalist Festivity Committee') should be seen as a deeply ironic gesture, as the Provo movement was vehemently anti-monarchist.

In an (again deeply ironic) manifesto (in the form of an open letter to the mayor of Amsterdam), printed on the last page of the publication, members of Oranje Komitee De Parel van de Jordaan congratulate the mayor with the police brutality, pointing out that it is exactly this "spectacle of brutality" that blew up the image of the monarchy, thereby revealing the "Pop-Art proportions of the Queen".

The general 'verso/recto' concept of the booklet is very interesting as well, the newspaper clippings on the left-hand pages being constantly nuanced and countered by the photographs on the right-hand pages (and vice versa), creating an atmosphere of permanent dialogue.



In 'Je Bevrijden van de Drukpers' ('To Liberate Yourself from the Printing Press'), an article that appeared in 1991 in the magazine 'Jeugd en Samenleving' ('Youth and Society'), Rob Stolk talks to Tjebbe van Tijen about the relationship between activism and printing. In that interview, Rob also briefly mentions the technical difficulties of printing the 10-3-66 publication:

"I once cooperated with Chris Hahn on a booklet that included photos by Koen Wessing, documenting the riots during Beatrix' wedding. It was printed quite weakly, but that was because we had a tiny offset press that was impossible to apply any ink on. Although we screened ('rasterized') the images quite decently, especially considering the time, the machine just couldn't pull it off. We printed it on A4 sheets – it was still a pretty neat publication for those days."



10-3-66 (part 2)

Following the Provo-related protests that took place during the royal wedding procession of March 10, 1966, a small exhibition was installed at the space of publisher Polak & Van Gennep (situated at Prinsengracht 820, Amsterdam). The exhibition featured photos by Cor Jaring, Ed van der Elsen, Koen Wessing and G.J. (Gerrit Jan) Wolffensperger, documenting the police brutality that took place during those protests of the 10th of March.

Shown at the bottom of the opposite page is a pamphlet (back and front), announcing that exhibition (A4-sized, two-sided, offset-printed, black & white).

Shown above is a spread

that features a photograph of a white bicycle, held up by a crowd. Clearly visible on that photo is the pamphlet, as attached to the chain case of the bike. This photo, taken by Cor Jaring in 1966, appeared in many international newspapers and magazines – the spread shown here comes from the January 1990 issue of *High Times*, but the picture also famously appears on the cover of issue 66 (vol.6, no. 8) of the English magazine *Anarchy* (August 1966).

Somehow, the wide-spread publication of this particular picture gave rise to the popular myth that the numbers shown on the bike (10-3-66) functioned as some sort of numeral code for a combination lock – something that is simply not true. As can be seen above, 10-3-66 clearly refers to a date: March 10, 1966... And there's definitely no bike lock involved.



10-3-66 (part 3)

While hundreds of people were waiting in the street to enter the gallery space, the police entered the scene again, launching an attack on the unsuspected public.

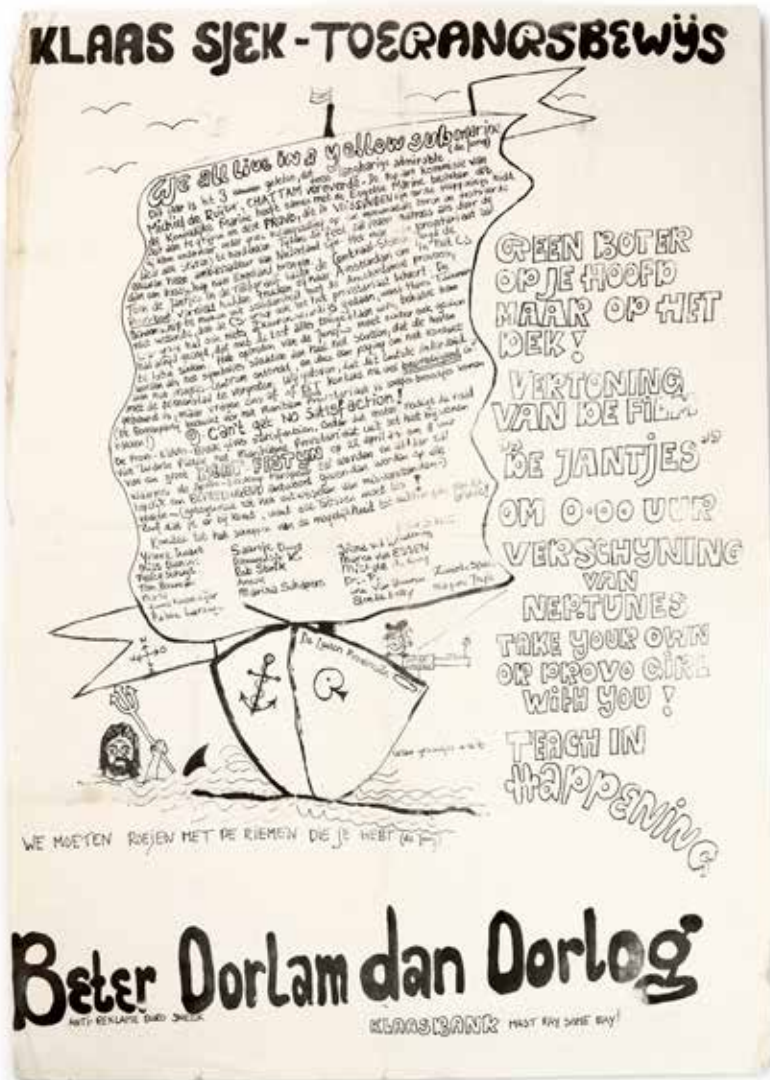
In 'Provo: Amsterdam's Anarchist Revolt' (Autonome Media, 2007), Richard Kempton quotes Roel van Duijn describing the whole event as a 'spiegelbeeld-provokatie' ('mirrored provocation'): people inside the gallery, looking at pictures of police brutality, while actual police brutality was going on outside of the gallery.

Director Louis van Gasteren and cinematographer Theo Hogers perfectly captured this situation in 'Omdat Mijn Fiets Daar Stond' ('Because My

Bike Was There'), a hallucinatory mixture of experimental cinema and propaganda tactics. After the opening speech by Jan Wolkers, the short movie focuses (in graphic repetition) on one of the victims of the police attack.

Of particular interest is the manner in which Jan Wolkers discusses the 'smoke bombs' that were being used by the protesters of March 10 (and technically speaking, these weren't really 'bombs', but non-explosive devices produced to create smoke screens).

Wolkers refers to these screens as "smoke signals, one of the oldest languages in the world", which is a great way to describe the way in which the Provo movement managed to use the city as a platform to showcase these smoke signals – as a ludic stage for this archetypal form of communication. It perfectly encapsulates the Provotarian interpretation of Amsterdam – the city as a device to produce and reproduce language.



Beter Oorlam dan Oorlog Better Booze than Brawl

'Beter Oorlam dan Oorlog' ('Better Booze than Brawl'). Poster, offset-printed, black and white, one-sided, 60.1 x 42.4 cm. Anti-Reklame Buro Sneek (Rob Stolk), 1967.

Pamphlet announcing the re-opening of the Apollo Cinema (at that time situated at Haarlemmerdijk 82, Amsterdam), taking place on April 22, 1967.

Referring to the violent clashes between Provos and marines that took place between April 4 and April 6, 1967 (the so-called 'Schoon Schip' charges), the poster takes on a nautical theme, inviting the sailors (ironically described as "the marine provotariat") to a screening of 'De Jantjes' (a classic Dutch musical on the subject of the Royal Navy).

Created by 'Anti-Reklame Buro Sneek' ('Anti-Advertising Agency Snake', one of the many monikers under which Rob Stolk operated), the poster also features the usual Grootveld-inspired iconography: the 'Gnot'-apples, the mentions of 'Klaas' (the mythical figure that plays a messianic role within the narrative of Provo: 'Klaas Komt!'), etc.

Pop-dialectically speaking, it's also interesting to note that the poster combines quotes by both the Beatles ('Yellow Submarine') and the Stones ('Satisfaction').

Already foreshadowing the later split within Provo (the movement would be liquidated only a few weeks later, on May 13, 1967), it could be argued that the Neptune-like caricature in the water is meant to poke fun at Roel van Duijn – while the figure on the deck looks remarkably like Rob Stolk. But again, this is just speculation.

'Beter Oorlam dan Oorlog' also makes an appearance in the photograph below – the poster can be seen in the background, on the right.



The picture (circa 1967) shows Rob Stolk (on the right) and his brother, graphic designer Swip Stolk (on the left).

While Swip was never a full member of Provo, he was indeed involved in some of the movement's printed output: in April 1965, he designed the cover of *Barst*, Rob's first anarchist magazine. Two years later, Swip also designed the cover of issue 13 of *Provo* magazine (which was later recycled as the cover of issue 15).

In the photo, Rob holds a copy of 'Het Slechtste uit Provo' – which shouldn't be confused with 'Het Beste uit Provo'. However, the relationship between 'Het Slechtste' and 'Het Beste' is another story, for another time.

Barst

Magazine (16 pages), edition of 300. Stapled, folded, 21.8 x 17.2 cm. Offset-printed cover, mimeographed interior.

Before *Provo*, there was *Barst*.

In April 1965, and under the moniker of the Anarchistische Werkgroep Zaanstreek, a 19-year-old Rob Stolk released the first (and only) issue of the anarchist magazine *Barst* (which can be translated as either 'Crack' or 'Burst').

Designed and published by Rob Stolk, the editorial team of *Barst* consisted of Rob, Sara Duys, Garnt Kroeze, and Klaas de Vries. The magazine featured contributions by people such as Roel van Duijn and Hans Tuynman, while the illustrations, as well as the front- and back-cover, were created by Rob's brother, Swip Stolk (under the pseudonym ZAS).

The specific binding of *Barst* is quite inventive – folded as an A5-sized booklet, the publication unwraps into a stapled A4-sized zine. An accompanying letterhead was produced as well.

In 'Imaazje: De Verbeelding van Provo, 1965–1967' (Wereldbibliotheek, 2003), Niek Pas notes that, for the mimeographic reproduction of

Barst, Rob received technical help from both *De Vrije* (Netherlands' oldest anarcho-socialist magazine,



founded in 1898 by Domela Nieuwenhuis), and from a befriended member of the PSP (the Dutch Pacifist-Socialist Party).

In other words, *Barst* is a good example of the way in which the Provo movement was ultimately rooted in a much older revolutionary Dutch tradition – a graphic tradition, to be specific.

What's also interesting to mention is the linguistic link between *Barst* ('Crack'), and the Dutch word for squatting, 'kraken' ('to crack open'). In fact, it was Rob Stolk who coined the verb 'kraken' (in the specific sense of 'to squat a house'), when he founded Woningburo De Kraker, back in 1968 (three years after *Barst*).

In our view, there's an interesting line to be drawn from pre-Provo *barsten* to post-Provo *kraken* – an ongoing search for the cracks in the law, the cracks in society, and the cracks in reality.



– safe crackers and car jackers. That’s when he got the idea of referring to the act of squatting as ‘kraken’ – literally, the act of ‘cracking open’ a house. The time in prison also gave Rob time to think about the legal loopholes that made squatting possible in the first place.

Immediately after his release, he ran into a friend, and enthusiastically told him about his plans to start a action committee solely dedicated to squatting: Woningburo De Kraker.

Woningburo De Kraker (“Housing Agency The Squatter”) consisted of Rob and a couple of his close friends (including Tjebbe van Tijen and Tom Bouman), and had as its slogan “Woningburo de Kraker doet het steeds vaker” – “Housing Agency The Squatter does it again and again”.

Shortly after the founding of Woningburo De Kraker, they published their notorious ‘Krakershandleiding’ (or ‘Handleiding Krakers’) – an A4-sized, 14-page squatters’ manual (consisting of instructions, statements, articles and newspaper clippings), featuring a brightly screenprinted cover.

What’s particularly interesting about this cover is the inclusion of the slogan “Redt un pandje, bezet un pandje” (“Save a space, occupy a space”), as it clearly illustrates the direct link between the Provo movement (which liquidated itself in 1967), and the organized squatting movement (which emerged in 1968). After all, “Redt un pandje, bezet un pandje” was a typical Provo slogan, and already appeared in pamphlets such as the Witte Huizenplan (White Housing Plan), from 1966.

Another direct link can be found in the financing of the manual. The publication (as well as other activities related to Woningburo De Kraker, and Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt) was funded by the dada-istically-named ‘Stichting ter Bevordering van een Goed en Goedkoop Leven’, which was basically the money that Rob (and his close allies) received from selling his personal Provo archive to the University of Amsterdam (UvA), immediately after the liquidation of Provo (this money was mainly used for paying off some old debts made by the Provo movement, as well as supporting various post-Provo action groups).

The fact that this Provo archive provided the economic underpinnings of so many post-Provo activities (most of them related to squatting, and the



Krakershandleiding Squatters’ Manual

Krakershandleiding, A4-sized (oblong) booklet. 14 stapled offset-printed pages (7 double-sided sheets, black and white), and a screenprinted cover (featuring drawings by Tjebbe van Tijen and Rob Stolk). Published by Federatie Onafhankelijke Vakgroepen and Buro De Kraker, early 1969.

Rob Stolk has actually been in prison twice – in 1968, for publishing the so-called ‘Subversive Letter’ (we’ll discuss this letter in a future post), and in 1969, for his involvement in the occupation of Het Maagdenhuis.

During his six-week prison stay of 1968, Rob found himself surrounded by people who referred to themselves as ‘kluiskrakers’ and ‘autokrakers’

Nieuwmarkt protests) is a wonderfully concrete example of the way in which activism and architecture constantly influence each other, in order to enable each other.

Yet another illustration of the direct lineage between the Provo movement and the early squatting subculture can be found in the 'Krakersfilm' ('Squatters' Movie'), a 9-minute fragment of a never-completed documentary from 1969, produced by Pieter Boersma (photography), Robert Hartzema (editing) and Otto Schuurman (cinematography), chronicling the early squatters' scene in the Dappermarkt and Nieuwmarkt areas. The documentary features a group of activists (including Ad Leeftang, Tjebbe van Tijen, Rob Stolk and Pieter Boersma, among others), occupying some abandoned houses at the Wijtenbachstraat.

Again, what is particularly interesting about this footage is the direct link being made with Provo. The documentary starts with an image of a Provo pamphlet from 1966, announcing the White Housing Plan. Meanwhile, a voice-over proclaims the text of the pamphlet, including slogans that are typical for Provo ('Redt un pandje, bezet un pandje', 'Lieverevolutie', etc.), while other phrases being used in the film ('Gnot tempel', 'Magies sentrum' and 'Imaazje') stem directly from the vocabulary of Robert Jasper Grootveld. In other words – it's a movie that clearly documents the transitional period from Provo to the early squatters' scene, and it's too bad it was never completed (let alone distributed).

The city as a sign, the sign as a city

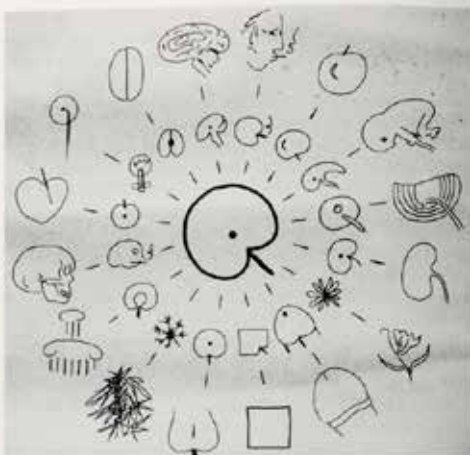
Photographed spread from 'Magiër van een Nieuwe Tijd: Het Leven van Robert Jasper Grootveld' ('Magician of a New Era: The Life of Robert Jasper Grootveld'), written by Eric Duivenvoorden (and published in 2009 by De Arbeiderspers, Amsterdam). The caption reads: "The 'Gnot'-sign, as presented by Bart Hughes and Robert Jasper Grootveld, during the 'Open the Tomb' happening of 1962".

The so-called 'Gnot Apple' was conceived around 1962 by pre-Provo pioneers Bart Hughes and Robert Jasper Grootveld, when they were looking for a sign to symbolize the notion of Amsterdam as 'Magies Sentrum' ('Magikal Senter'). The mark was presented during 'Open het Graf' ('Open the Tomb'), a legendary happening that took place on December 9, 1962, at an art space situated on the Prinsengracht. Co-organized by the poet Simon Vinkenoog (who played an important role in many Dutch post-war subcultures and movements), 'Open het Graf' is widely regarded as the first 'real' happening to take place in The Netherlands.

Originally, the sign encapsulated a whole range of possible meanings: from a third eye to a fetus, from a skull to a buttohole. In 1965, when the sign was adopted by the Provo movement, its meaning was narrowed down to the idea of the apple as a rendering of Amsterdam – an abstract map of the city, in which the circular outline represents the canals, the short stem (or stalk) symbolizes the Amstel river, and the dot depicts the Spui (the square where most of the Provo-related happenings took place).

From then on, the gnot sign became the unofficial logo of the Provo movement, appearing frequently in print and on walls. In a sense, it is the perfect mark for Provo: a psychogeographical micro-map, grounding the Provo movement firmly in the material surroundings of Amsterdam. It seems only natural that Provo (a movement so dedicated to the exploration of the city as a platform for graphic signs) used, as their main signature, a graphic sign representing the city.

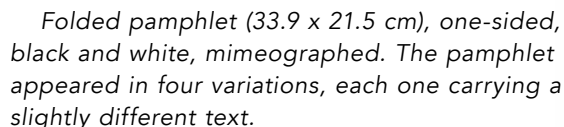
As for the word 'gnot' – this was yet another Grootveldian invention, a neologism mainly



Het Gnot-teken bij de presentatie door Bart Hughes en Robbie tijdens de Happening *Open het graf*, 1962.

en Robbie komen elkaar bijna dagelijks tegen in Little Lexington. Het gebeuren speelt zich af in een zonnige week medio oktober 1962. Enkele jaren later denkt Johnny nog met veel genoegen terug aan zijn avontuur met Robbie:

The image shows the front cover of a book. The cover is decorated with a red brick pattern, where each brick is a reddish-orange color and the mortar lines are a lighter, off-white color. The pattern is consistent across the entire surface. At the bottom of the cover, the word "PROVO" is written in a large, bold, black, hand-drawn font. The letters are slightly irregular, giving it a personal or artistic feel. The book's spine is visible on the left side, showing a dark, worn material. There are some signs of wear and tear, particularly along the right edge and corners, where the red brick paper has chipped away, revealing a lighter, yellowish-tan material underneath. A small, light-colored rectangular label is partially visible on the right edge near the top.



The pamphlet also lists an extended overview of the city's security measures that would be put in place during the wedding ceremony, including

PROVO

PROVO
3

the installment of stengun-carrying snipers on the roofs alongside the route – as the pamphlet concludes, “this marriage will have a fascist character”.

Most tellingly, the pamphlet featured a teenage portrait of Claus von Amsberg in 1944, sporting a uniform of the German Wehrmacht. (Before joining the Wehrmacht, Claus was also member of both the Deutsches Jungvolk and the Hitler Youth).

Below that, a photo of two kids protesting against the wedding procession, while wearing the pamphlets on their chests. Their pale, solemn faces strangely echo the young face of Claus. (Originally from 1966, the photo was re-published by *Vrij Nederland*, in their ‘Provo Special’ of August 3, 1985).

Pictures like these demonstrate the way in which the pamphlets, magazines and posters, as published by Provo, became part of the public environment of Amsterdam. By being distributed, carried, displayed and worn, these printed objects shaped the material surroundings of the city, turning its streets and canals into a graphic infrastructure of subversive language.

Brick wall pattern

First three issues of Provo magazine (published in July 1965, August 1965, and September 1965). 36–38 pages per issue. Size 105 x 297 mm (A4, folded in half). Stapled and taped. Mimeographed interior pages, ready-made brick-patterned wallpaper per cover, handwritten titles.

We already discussed the sign of the Gnot Apple, and the role this mark played within the graphic language of Provo. Another recurring visual motif that’s closely linked to Provo is the brick wall pattern.

The clearest example of this pattern can be found on the covers of the first few issue of the *Provo* magazine. These issues were wrapped in actual dollhouse wallpaper – ready-made brick-patterned paper, on which the word ‘Provo’ was scribbled by hand (using felt-tip markers), echoing the use of graffiti on walls.

This simple graphic gesture, of turning a piece of paper into a brick wall, is yet another illustration

of the way in which Provo managed to create new connections between the city and the printing press. While the city itself was turned into a graphic infrastructure (through the use of slogans, posters, and happenings), graphic signs were used to refer to the city. Walls were turned into magazines, and magazines were turned into walls.

In an early interview, one young Provo is quoted as saying that the brick wall pattern symbolizes “the wall everybody will bang their head against, sooner or later” (see Niek Pas, ‘Imaazje’, page 119) – which is one explanation for the wall. However, it seems more fitting to see the brick wall as a blank canvas, a ‘tabula rasa’ – an empty projection screen, ready to be filled up with the movement’s dreams and desires.



Liquidation of the Provo organization

Liekwiedaatsie van de Provo Organiesaaitsie: Auto-Provokaatsie (Liquidation of the Provo Organization: Auto-Provocation). Offset-printed poster, one-sided, 60.5 x 42.7 cm.

The liquidation of Provo was the movement's final masterpiece, a gesture that was in many ways more significant than the movement's foundation.

During the first months of 1967, a small group within Provo was already planning the movement's abolishment. In the view of this faction (later known as the 'Provo Likwidaatsie Kommissie'), the blown-up image of Provo had turned against the movement itself, and became counter-productive. In order for the individual Provos to be able to continue their activist agendas and subversive activities, the image ("imaazje") of Provo had to be dismantled, in a final auto-destructivist happening.

The above poster (drawn, written and printed by Rob Stolk) triggered this final event, announcing the liquidation that would take place on May 13, 1967, at the 'spieker's corner' (speaker's corner) in the Vondelpark. By simply creating this poster, and hanging it at a few Provo spots, the end of the movement was a fact. The power of print in full effect.

The poster literally shows the split within the 'House of Provo', the drawing clearly depicting Karthuizerstraat 14, Amsterdam (the building that Roel van Duijn, Carla Kuit, Rob Stolk and Sara Duijs shared together, during the Provo years – Roel/Carla on the first floor, and Rob/Sara on the second floor). It's not hard to imagine that the caricature of the bearded person, peeking through the window above the door, is in fact referring to Van Duijn.

Below the poster, we show two images related to an earlier attempt to liquidate the movement:

Through our research, we discovered that the original lay-outs of issue 14 of *Provo* magazine (February 15, 1967) already contained a short, open letter written by the pro-liquidation faction (signed by Rob Stolk and Lou/Loe van Nimwegen, together with an unidentified Anton), announcing their

withdrawal from Provo. This letter can be found in the so-called 'paste-ups': the camera-ready artwork of the magazine, set to be reproduced. The note is even apparent in the transparent film negatives that were made from these paste-ups. However, in the eventual printed version of issue 14 of *Provo* magazine, the letter has disappeared.

Our own theory (pure speculation) is that Rob Stolk removed the letter from the printing plate, right before printing. He must have felt that the liquidation of Provo needed a more significant moment – and hence, he pulled the letter, and planned a bigger finale: the liquidation as took place on May 13, 1967.

There exists some footage of this final happening. *Monitor* (Nederlandse Televisie Stichting, 1967) shows a tumultuous public meeting in which all speakers 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 Provos now being unemployed, during a near-dadaist performance of irony and wordplay.

A couple of months after the self-liquidation of Provo at the Vondelpark, the Hippies repeated the gesture, at the Buena Vista Park in San Francisco (the notorious Hippie Funeral of October 6, 1967).



A typology of statues

Waarom stemmen lastige Amsterdammers Provo? (Why do Amsterdam troublemakers vote Provo?). A4-sized, double-sided pamphlet. Illustrations by Willem (Bernard Holtrop).

One of the reasons why we find the above pamphlet (a Provo election flyer from May 18, 1966) so interesting is the specific manner in which illustrations of well-known Amsterdam statues (such as Het Lieverdje, the Domela Nieuwenhuis monument, De Dokwerker) are being used here to depict the "typical voters of the Provo party".

In that sense, the flyer is a key document for understanding the relationship between Provo and the city – and specifically, the way in which Provo managed to occupy the imagination of Amsterdam through the appropriation (both physically and ritually) of the town's landmarks.

By staging site-specific performances (happenings, protest marches, etc.) around well-chosen statutes, these public sculptures and monuments were transformed into archetypes within the larger Provo narrative. Each icon referred to well-known models within the pantheon of Provo – Het Lieverdje stood for the youngster, the nozem, the juvenile consumer, both innocent and corruptible; De Dokwerker represented the worker, the labourer, the old proletariat; the statue of Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis symbolized Provo's anarcho-pacifist roots; while the Van Heutsz-monument referred to the authoritarian figure, the powers that had to be defeated.

By remaking the statues of Amsterdam into Provotarian archetypes, Provo effectively turned the lay-out of the city into a symbolical, psycho-geographical space – a platform for collective creativity.

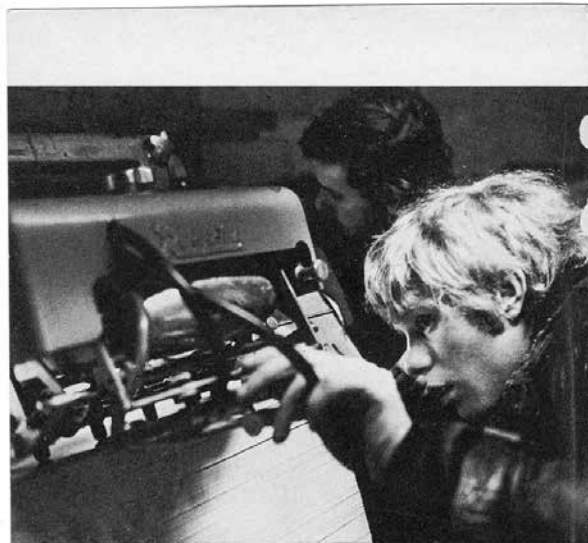
As it happens, the Dutch word 'beeld' has two meanings: 'statue' and 'image'. It seems only logical that Provo, a movement so dedicated to the notion of the 'blown-up' image (both the enlarged image and the deconstructed image), had a particular interest in statues as well. It all comes down to the détournement of 'beelden' – in both senses of the word.



Five famous doctors

Out now: Provo! (Five famous doctors recommend Provo). Poster/pamphlet, July 12, 1965. One-sided, mimeographed, 21.5 x 33.9 cm.

Provo has always aligned itself with Pop-Art (and in some cases even described itself as 'political Pop-Art'). This poster seems a clear example of this 'pop'-side of Provo – five comic characters (Dr. Frankenstein, Dr. Ben Casey, Dr. No, Dr. Killdare, and Dr. Killjoy), announcing the first issue of *Provo* magazine, in a playful act in détournement.



Arbeidsschuwe provoos, Rob Stolk (rechts) en Fred Fontijn, aan de provopers.

Printing press at Bloemstraat, Amsterdam (circa 1966). Page from 'Het Witte Gevaar' (Meulenhoff, 1967). The caption reads "Work-shy Provos, Rob Stolk (in the foreground) and Fred Fontijn (in the background), operating the Provo press".

On printing Provo

'Je Bevrijden van de Drukpers' ('To Liberate Yourself from the Printing Press') was a Dutch article published in 1991 in the magazine 'Jeugd en Samenleving' ('Youth and Society'). Written by the archivist, activist and artist Tjebbe van Tijen, the article featured interviews with a selection of people that were, each in their own way, involved in the printing of independent youth magazines. One of the persons being interviewed was Rob Stolk. What follows is a translation of the full interview.

Provo 1965–1967

I never attended a school for printing, so I wasn't fully aware of all the possibilities available for publishing pamphlets. And if you aren't aware of that, there's only one thing you're focused on, and that's the costs. When you have an idealistic background, and you want to publish printed matter (an anti-war pamphlet, for example), it basically means that you won't recover your money.

My first produced pamphlet was related to the activities we undertook as pacifist-socialist youngsters. We used a stencil duplicator (mimeograph machine) owned by a comrade of the PSP [Pacifist Socialist Party] at his place on the Westzijde in Zaandam. That thing was ancient, you had to operate it manually.

If we wanted to add something fancy, like an illustration, we had to order a 'photo stencil', as we didn't own a stencil-making machine ourselves. A stencil like that costed us seven and a half guilders, a considerable sum in those days. We picked up those stencils in Amsterdam, at the Spuistraat.

When we mimeographed the first issue of *Provo*, we were offered the use of the machine of mister De Groot, a subscriber to 'Recht voor Allen' [a Dutch anarcho-socialist magazine, originally founded in 1879], who had one of those machines standing in his attic. We were printing there until the early hours. That guy really enjoyed that he could

support us that way. He had always hoped that a new generation would keep his ideals alive.

The first issue of *Provo* was mimeographed in an edition of 500, of which approximately 100 copies were actually distributed. The rest was confiscated by the police because of a text on how to manufacture bombs, a 19th century nonsense article that came illustrated with a glued-in firecracker.

This immediately meant that there was enormous demand for the second issue. We printed 2000 of those; a gigantic task. Part of that edition was eventually printed at Roneo in the Spuistraat. Imagine those guys dressed in tidy suits and grey dust-coats, printing our magazine surrounded by office machines.

At a certain point, we started relocating our stencil machine. We had so much trouble with pamphlets being confiscated, because of insults to the queen and pranks like that – we just had to keep on moving the machine.

One time, we were printing an issue of *Provo* in a tiny room in the Staatsliedenbuurt, in the house of a lady who had no idea what the magazine was about, but she assumed it was alright since her son was involved. I was constantly dragging suitcases and piles of paper around; nobody knew the location of the machine but me.

Very quickly, it became clear to us that the distribution of *Provo* was dependent only on our ability to produce it. The demand was huge. The public had no idea what these Provos were about, and much to everybody's surprise, these kids also published a magazine! That was a huge difference compared to the previous image of 'pleiners', 'dijkers' and 'nozems' [Dutch youth cultures, comparable to mods, rockers and teddy boys], thugs no one really understood. In that sense, the Provos were perceived quite differently: at least, they published a magazine!

We then bought an offset press, and installed it in a tiny basement. That was in the Bloemstraat, at Henk Raaf's place, who ran a small travel agency from there. This was around 1966. After the 10th of March [the riots during the wedding procession of Princess Beatrix and Claus von Amsberg], we were all arrested. The police had a rough idea where the press was located; they had the feeling that if they would manage to confiscate the

press, the trouble would be over – that's the way they thought back then. It never occurred to them that the press would be located in a neat building, in the basement of a travel agency. They were searching for long-haired people who were walking in and out of houses carrying printed matter, but of course, carrying printed matter in and out of a traveling agency was considered to be very normal. So they never found that press.

The print run of later editions of *Provo* reached 10,000. These copies were paid for only partially. If a new issue of *Provo* rolled off the press, youngsters came by to take stacks of magazines with them. Loe/Lou van Nimwegen [responsible for the administrative part of the printing] gave them 25 copies each. They sold those copies for 70 cent or so, and had to pay us part of that. Some of these guys you never saw back, while others just kept on selling.

Some of them sold a couple of hundred copies on a single day; they immediately had enough money on them for the whole month. Maybe that was the problem; there was not enough stimulus to keep things going. We also tried to distribute the magazine through Van Gelder. Maybe that was exactly the strength of the magazine: the fact that the supply never met the demand, so that it always stayed something of a curiosity. If you managed to get a copy, it was special. It was never professionally organized, in terms of distribution.

Swiftly setting a text is a difficult task. You always had to search for the right typewriter, with the best letter. You wanted to act quickly, so you didn't want to rely on suppliers of professional typography. This meant that aesthetically, things could get problematic. But of course, this was exactly what made the design so specifically sub-cultural. It went against the commercial design of mainstream printed culture – a mainstream culture that was boring and annoying.

True, within the *Provo* movement there were also designers who, within other contexts, designed beautiful things; costly productions that were in a different league compared to the printed matter of *Provo*. But then again, we never had the pretension to measure ourselves against that. Subversive printed matter simply wasn't meant to be beautiful.

I have always operated from the absolute minimum of money and assets. The people who were

participating in these publications didn't have a dime to spare. The plan was to produce it as cheap as possible, and to distribute it as wide as possible.

It was around that time that, at magazines such as *Hitweek*, a new form of design came into existence – one that was very different from the design that was common at advertising agencies. Also, with the rise of offset printing, it was no longer the typesetter who performed the job according to the instructions of the client; instead, the whole discipline of design became separated from the printing. The offset plate became the medium that could be filled with images and typography completely independent of the printer's typesetting case.

I once cooperated with Chris Hahn on a booklet that included photos by Koen Wessing, documenting the riots during Beatrix' wedding. It was printed quite weakly, but that was because we had a tiny offset press that was impossible to apply any ink on. Although we screened ('rasterized') the images quite decently, especially considering the time, the machine just couldn't pull it off. We printed it on A4 sheets – it was still a pretty neat publication for those days. But again, the costs and the proceeds didn't match up.

It just wasn't organized well enough to sustain. That's typical though for political projects: the distribution is geared mainly to get the publication to as many people as possible, not to get any money back.

Hitweek [a then 'hip' Dutch music magazine] was a commercial enterprise, where they took into consideration the costs, the office hours, the phone bills. If we would have produced *Provo* in such a way it would have had a larger reach, especially if we would have included music coverage. But there were a lot of people who weren't into that. Roel van Duijn wasn't exactly a fan of the Beatles.

In the end, a magazine is a conspiracy of people who all have a say about it. And if these people don't agree on a subject, the tendency is to keep that subject out of the magazine. Cooperation consists of that what you do together.

It also depended on who was momentarily responsible for the content. This responsibility was handed over from person to person. In the beginning

it was mainly Roel's job, but if he dominated too much editorially, it was pulled from his hands. Which meant that he refused to take part in the following issue, resulting in a totally different editorial tone.

I always wanted to employ my own printing press, because I always longed to publish things, for example magazines like *Bethaniënnieuws* or *Nieuwsmarkt* [magazines affiliated with Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt]. In my view, these initiatives could only be conceivable if you had your own printing press.

If you have to work with budgets like these, with print runs like these, on initiatives like these, and it lasts for only one or two issues – it's impossible to deal with. In the end, we could only continue our activities by trying to make money with printing; by taking on assignments. Added to that, we owned some money from selling the Provo archive. So we had some resources to continue printing.

But it still remained a struggle to keep on going. Just look at the difficulties that *Bluf* [an '80s squatting magazine] had, trying to sustain in a non-profit way.

On the rise of screen-printed posters, especially those designed in the '60s by Ontbijt op Bed [a Provo-related group from Maastricht]:

These posters were of a beauty... Spectacular, wonderful, really incredible. So, just like Kees Graaf [printer of *Ontbijt op Bed*], I started screen-printing, but without the know-how and resources that he had.

The problem remained though: how to make a living...

On the rise of psychedelic posters, which also happened around that time:

That was something we had nothing to do with; this whole sphere of 'alternative culture'... In our eyes, those posters were still commercial commodities. We did everything we could to avoid that scene. Which is why I also worked as a plasterer, doing construction work with Ronnie and Otto, because I'd rather do that than to print commercially. To

me, printing was something sacred; it was my weapon, a way to manifest oneself, and to cause confusion.

More and more, I realized I didn't want to stand in the foreground of the activities I participated in. That would have been very counterproductive as well: to give the impression that it was "always the same guys". In that sense, Provo also became very counterproductive.

Everything that came after Provo had an easier time manifesting itself, because of the vacuum that Provo left behind. Provo stopped, but the ideas was still there, the newspapers took notice, there was a voice that wasn't there before. People outside the official circuit were suddenly being heard. You only had to start a committee or group, and you were in the news. If people were agitated about certain issues, it was in the newspapers. Before Provo, that was unthinkable.

Apart from those printing companies who weren't members of the Koninklijk Verbond van Drukkerijen [trade organization for printers] and artists printing independently, Provo was one of the first post-war presses that wasn't being exploited as a commercial printing company. Many others followed that example.

After the liquidation of Provo, we handed over the press for 6000 guilders or so, which we used to pay off our debts at the paper suppliers. The press was passed on to ASVA [a left-wing student organization], who set up SSP, the Stichting Studentenpers [the Students' Press]. The SSP still exists, but I don't know if they are still affiliated with ASVA.

This whole counterculture of independent printers has more a political background than a cultural background, at least in The Netherlands. It was quite simple in those days to get hold of a cheap, reasonably functioning press. The bar to start a printing company wasn't set so high: if you had a couple of thousand guilders, you had a pretty decent Rotaprint press. The clients weren't so demanding, so all it took was a minimum of means.

If a client asks you to deliver a certain product, you have to deal with a totally different set of requirements than when you only have to meet your own requirements. If it's your own initiative to publish something, then what matters most is the content, not the quality of printing. There was an

urgency then to get the information out as quickly as possible, to as many readers as possible.

In fact, I still believe that a simple text can be more important than the most intricate design. It is certainly possible to express something original, without it being printed perfectly. You should be able to look beyond the design.

It seems very clear to me that a country without a free press is a country that sucks, because it is a country that conceals things. A society in which people have the possibility to organize themselves freely, to express themselves freely, is always a better society. I am fully convinced that the free press is one of the most important forces behind the progress of human society.

Rob Stolk (as interviewed by Tjebbe van Tijen), Amsterdam 1991

Translated by Experimental Jetset, on the occasion of the EJ-curated exhibition 'Two or Three Things I Know About Provo', as took place in 2011 at artists' space W139 (Amsterdam).

The original (Dutch) version of this interview can be found on the website of the International Institute of Social History (IISG), as well as on Tjebbe van Tijen's own website (Imaginary Museum Projects).

Another excellent interview with Rob Stolk, again focusing on his authorship as a printer, can be found in the Spring issue of 'OpNieuw' (Volume 19, 2001). Written by Tineke Nijenhuis, this article focuses more on Rob's role within various magazines that were published after Provo, during the Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt period.

The best action committee in the world

Copies of 'Amsterdams Weekblad', being made ready for postal distribution. Photo by Ernest Annyas, as shown on page 29 of 'De Beste Aktiegroep ter Wereld' (De Oude Stad, 1984).

The following interview focuses on Rob Stolk's role as activist (and printer) in Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt (roughly 1967–1975), the action committee that successfully protested against the demolition of the Amsterdam Nieuwmarkt district (and surrounding areas). The interview was originally published in 'De Beste Aktiegroep ter Wereld: 40 Dorpsverhalen uit de Nieuwmarkt', an extremely interesting book that was published in 1984, by Uitgeverij De Oude Stad (in cooperation with Wijkcentrum d'Oude Stad).

Readers interested in the Nieuwmarkt protests should definitely check out this publication – it's one of the best oral histories on the subject. People being interviewed include Rob Stolk, Luud Schimmelpennink, Tjebbe van Tijen, Steef Davidson, Pieter Boersma and many others; the interviewer was Tineke Nijenhuis. Rob's answers can be read below.

Rob Stolk (1946) had a printing office in the Koestraat. The Nieuwmarkt area was his field of action.

Rob: In 1968, I was imprisoned for seven weeks at the House of Detention in Scheveningen, because we published a letter in *Provo*, on the subject of city development. After my release, I came into contact with Hans 't Mannetje, who worked in the Bethaniën area on *Bethaniënnieuws*, a newspaper he published with a couple of other people. He managed to get me a basement in the Koestraat, which I could rent from the Diogenes Foundation for the symbolic price of 10 guilders per month. There, I set up a little printing press (a remainder from the *Provo* period), and a silkscreen table. Printing was more like a labour of love – I had a job on the side as a plasterer. Printing was only possible because my wife Saar was working as a nurse. I wouldn't describe it as an 'activist printing office'; I really regarded it as my own printing office, a place where I could focus on my own interests. And my main interest was the Nieuwmarkt area. It might have been De Pijp as well, if that area would have



been threatened by the metro [the Amsterdam subway].

The Nieuwmarkt area was more or less a cluster of plans: the city council wanted to construct a subway, a highway, office buildings. If you wanted to stop these developments, you could only do that in cooperation with the people who were living there, and wanted to stay there, and all the other inhabitants of Amsterdam who cared about the area.

There was a continuous stream of people dropping by at the printing office to work on *Bethaniënnieuws*. Our plan was to attack the council's policies through direct action, and not through political bargaining. The goal of the newspaper was to influence the public opinion – first the opinion of the people living in the area, and later that of the whole of Amsterdam.

Occasionally we undertook 'kraak' [squatting] actions. One of us was specialized in busting doors open. We named ourselves 'Woningburo de Kraker' ['Housing Agency the Squatter'], and came together every Friday night in the coffeeshop of Jan Bisschop, at the Kloveniersburgwal. That scene really expanded. For a while, we used those Friday nights to design posters or pamphlets – that way, it wouldn't be just small talk.

In the 1960s, there were already a lot of squatters in Amsterdam, only they weren't known under that name yet. An example of that would be the Kattenburg area. If, in that area, one of the squatted houses was being demolished, the squatters just moved to the next block, which had to be demolished two years later or so.

With Woningburo de Kraker, we really tried to change that passive situation. Among other things, we published a manual for squatters ['Handleiding Krakers'], compiling our combined experiences.

We also published current lists of empty houses. We tried to put squatting in a more political context. We had to find the arguments for that, to try to formulate those arguments, to spread these arguments under the nomadic youngsters, to defend them against the city council and the mainstream press – not an easy task.

matters (the injustice in the Third World, the war in Vietnam) to local issues. That was something which many people held against us. They would ask us what our main focus was, and we would answer "well, mostly our immediate environment". Outside of Nieuwmarkt circles, that was completely unheard of; it really went against the prevailing opinion.

With a small group of people, we started experimenting to find the right tone of voice. We only managed to find that tone when, after a few issues of *Bethaniënnieuws*, Tom Bouman, one of our contributors, went on to publish his own weekly newspaper: *Lastage*. Tom had years of experience at [mainstream newspapers] *Het Parool* and *De Haagse Post*. He had an outspoken knowledge and expertise when it came to producing a newspaper, which sometimes led to clashes in the editorial team. He also thought our tone was too demagogic. That's why, at a certain moment, he called it quits, and decided to start his own newspaper. The tone of *Lastage* was not as overtly political as *Bethaniënnieuws*. *Lastage* came across as a 'real' newspaper, focusing on local matters, and including historical facts about the Nieuwmarkt area; it was very accessible, readable and lively. That was the right tone, which was lacking in our own publication. Tom saw that.

When *Lastage* became too much of a task for Tom, we decided to help him. The fusion of those two newspapers (*Bethaniënnieuws* and *Lastage*) was called *Nieuwmarkt*. It was a weekly paper, which ran for a year. After that year, Tom left, and moved to Groningen. After *Nieuwmarkt*, we started a weekly newspaper for the whole of Amsterdam: *Amsterdams Weekblad*. The printing office moved to the Keizersstraat, where I started a company with Lou (Loe) van Nimwegen. And in 1972, we moved to De Pijp.

I always loved undertaking direct action on a local scale. We really had a defined field of action. Usually, activism is geared towards issues that seem relatively far away. But with the Nieuwmarkt actions, it all felt very direct, very immediate. When the council had planted something in the ground, to support their plans, you immediately went there with a couple of guys, to remove it. Sometimes this directness led to illegal actions. It was sometimes difficult to find a common ground, to decide where to draw the line on which actions

were tolerable and which weren't. True, that is certainly up for debate, but in the end, it all depends on the circumstances. You can't always control that.

At a certain moment, we put a siren on the roof, to warn and mobilize the people if something was going on. After a while, this led to huge conflicts, in which people got involved personally, because their own housing was at stake. This is what you also see during wage disputes: that people are truly enraged.

The city council often stated that Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt fanned the flames, but in my view that wasn't the case at all. Let me put it this way: it wasn't our specific intention to stir up the people against the police. But they kept accusing us of that. None of it was true of course, but the city council kept repeating it, even though it was clear that it was nonsense. When a tube station was attacked with a bomb, the council flatly blamed us, even though they very well knew it was the work of Max Lewin [a right-wing activist, affiliated with Joop Baank, another far-right figure].

Once, during a debate at the city council, we gave Frans van Bommel a bottle of butyric acid, for him to empty in the council chamber. In retrospect, and looking at it from a critical distance, we crossed a line there. I would find such a thing very problematic now. I also came to understand that, even though you didn't start the violence, you still have to act responsibly.

It is indeed startling that some of those council bureaucrats were later decorated by the Queen, while it is now generally accepted that their policies were a fiasco. That became very clear during the opening of the tube station at the Weesperplein. It is amazing that those who still defend the council's failure, are now being nominated for honorary positions. As if they were on the right side. I don't think they should be proud of that. I'm now specifically thinking about a person like Han Lammers; I never saw someone who changed his opinions so quickly to conform to the mainstream. Come to think of it, it's logical people see him as a good administrator.

It turned out to be a battle of prestige. The decisions of the city council were completely blocked by the stubbornness of the neighborhood. It was quite a unique situation; I wouldn't know

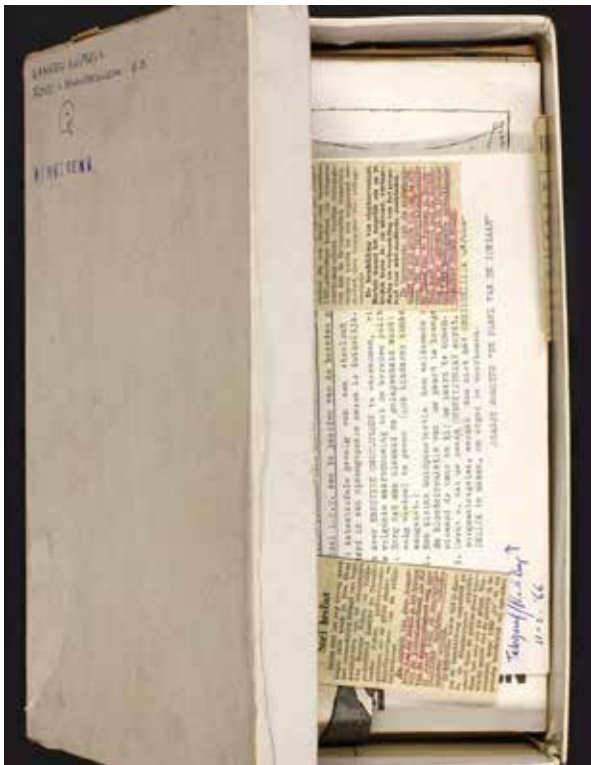
what to compare it with. It was such a splendid example of stubbornness.

Obviously, it is nice to live with the idea that, even if only for a couple of times, you actually managed to go against some blatantly wrong decisions. More people should experience that feeling. Imagine if you always had to submit to the situation, even when that situation is unfair. When I read that they are currently calculating whether they should demolish the Bijlmermeer project or not, I do think that I fought for the right cause, despite my imprisonment.

Rob Stolk (as interviewed by Tineke Nijenhuis), 1984. *Translated (from Dutch to English) by Experimental Jetset, on the occasion of the EJ-curated exhibition 'Two or Three Things I Know About Provo', as took place in 2011 at Amsterdam artists' space W139.*

A very similar interview with Rob Stolk, again by Tineke Nijenhuis, appeared in 2001, in a magazine called 'OpNieuw' (spring issue, volume 19), under the title 'Drukken en doordrukken' ('To Print and Print Through').





The Provo archive of Rob would eventually end up in the collection of the International Institute of Social History (IISG). Also included in that collection is the compact, personal archive of Loe (Lou) van Nimwegen, an activist who worked closely with Rob during the Provo and Nieuwmarkt periods. Shown above, Loe's archive as we photographed it at IISG – a shoebox, filled with loose newspaper clippings and a scrapbook, including a handwritten table of contents. [Coll. IISG].

Provo as archive

Archive of Loe van Nimwegen. A shoebox, filled with loose newspaper clippings and a scrapbook, including a handwritten contents page.

Provo is a perfect example of the notion of activism and archivism being two sides of the same coin. Right after the liquidation of Provo (in 1967), Rob Stolk sold his personal Provo archive to the library of the University of Amsterdam (UVA). The money thus earned was deposited immediately into a newly-established foundation called 'Stichting ter Bevordering van een Goed en Goedkoop Leven'. A lot of activities around the Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt were financed by that foundation.

This anecdote is noteworthy for two reasons. First of all, it clearly shows how well-aware Rob (and other Provos) were of the cultural value of Provo-as-an-archive. And secondly, it demonstrates how one social movement (Provo) can provide the fuel for another social movement (Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt). A telling example of the vital role archives can play in activism.



Image

A4-sized magazines, mimeographed, approximately 10–16 pages per issue. In chronological order: *Image* 3 (August 7, 1966), *Image* 5 (August 20, 1966), *Image* 6 (September 4, 1966), *Image* 8 (September 24, 1966).

During its existence (1965–1967), the Provo movement published several magazines – first of all, the monthly *Provo*, which remains their most important publication. Next to that, they created *God, Nederland & Oranje*, a zine that focused mostly on satire and cartoons.

And for a short while in 1966, they also printed *Image* (to be pronounced as 'Imaazje') – a weekly newsletter, meant as a quick outlet for information, to be published in-between the monthly issues of *Provo*.

The weekly *Image* only lasted eight issues, and appeared alongside many other pamphlets (known as *Provocations*). In a documented conversation between Rob Stolk and Tjebbe van Tijen (January 10, 1991 / IISG GC4–367), Rob referred to *Image* as an attempt to “ritualize pamphletism” – providing a nice mystical dimension to the potential of printed matter.

Provo issue 4

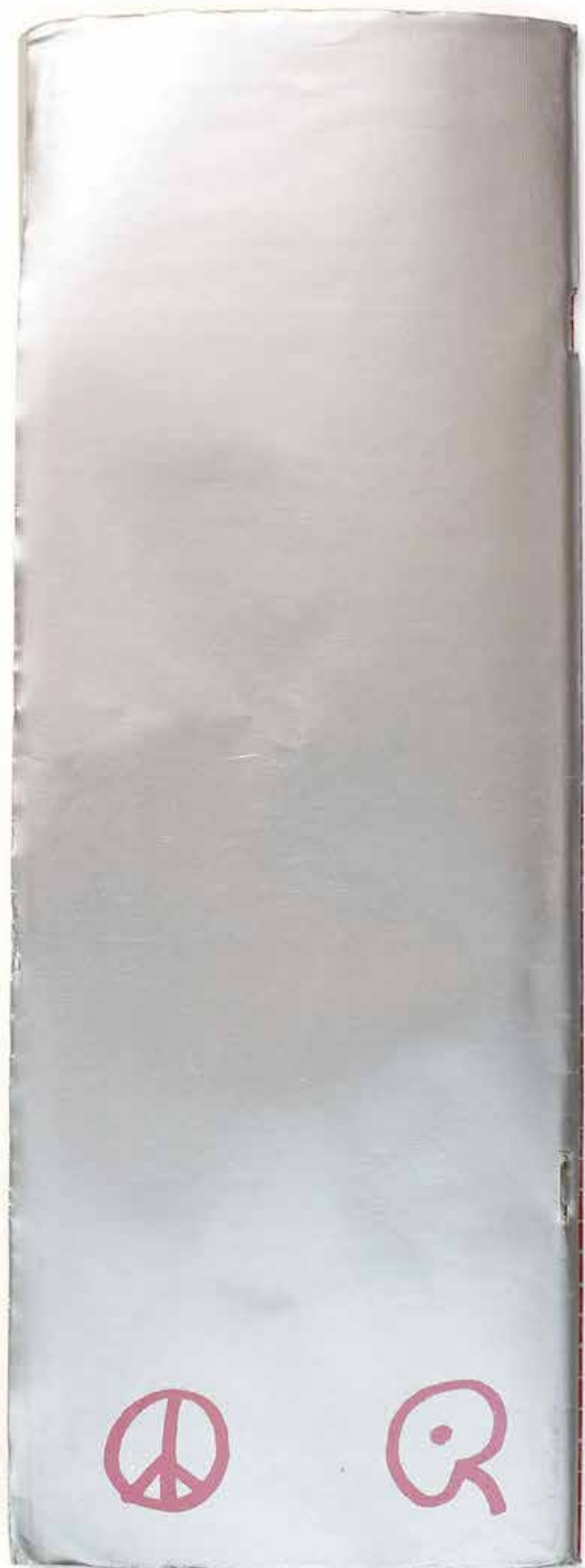
Provo, issue 4 (October 28, 1965). Metallic cover, handwritten title, mimeographed interior, 36 pages, 29.7 x 10.5 cm.

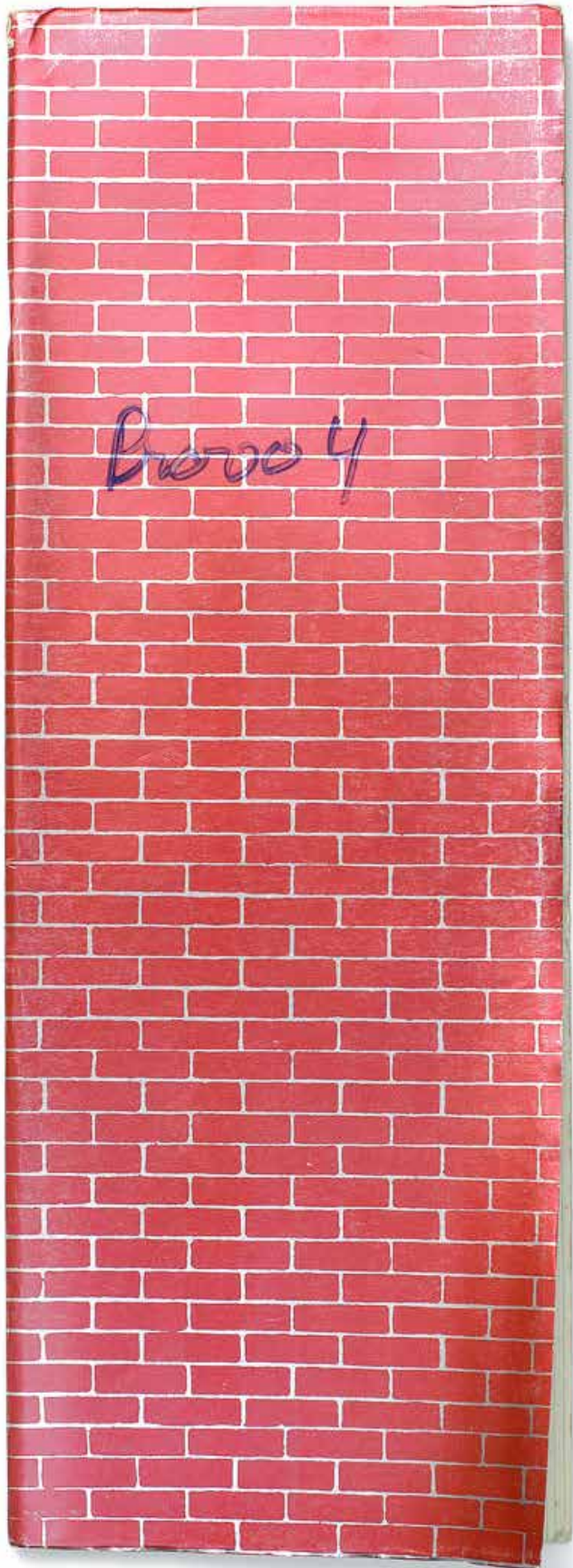
Shown here the back and front of the fourth issue of *Provo*, published around October 28, 1965, in an edition of 4,000–5,000.

Provo issue 5

Provo, issue 5 (December 18, 1965). Mimeographed, 36 pages, 29.7 x 10.5 cm.

Shown here the front of the fifth issue of *Provo*, published around December 18, 1965, in an edition of 1,500. The cover features a drawing by Dutch cartoonist Bernard 'Willem' Holtrop.





Provo issue 6

Provo, issue 6 (January 24, 1966). Mimeographed, 40 pages, 29.7 x 10.5 cm.

Shown here the front and back of the sixth issue of *Provo*, published around January 24, 1966, in an edition of 2,000.

Provo issue 7

Provo, issue 7 (February 25, 1966). Offset-printed, 40 pages, 29.7 x 10.5 cm.

Shown here the cover (back and front) of the seventh issue of *Provo*, published around February 25, 1966 – in a first edition of 3,000, and a second edition of 2,000 (most of them confiscated by the police). This particular issue also featured the so-called 'Subversieve brief' ('Subversive letter'), a text that eventually landed Rob Stolk in jail.

Provo issue 8

Provo, issue 8 (April 14, 1966). Offset-printed, 36 pages, 29.7 x 10.5 cm.

Shown here the cover (back and front) of the eight issue of *Provo*, published around April 14, 1966, in an edition of 10,000. The photo on the front is by Dutch photographer Cor Jaring.

Provo issue 9

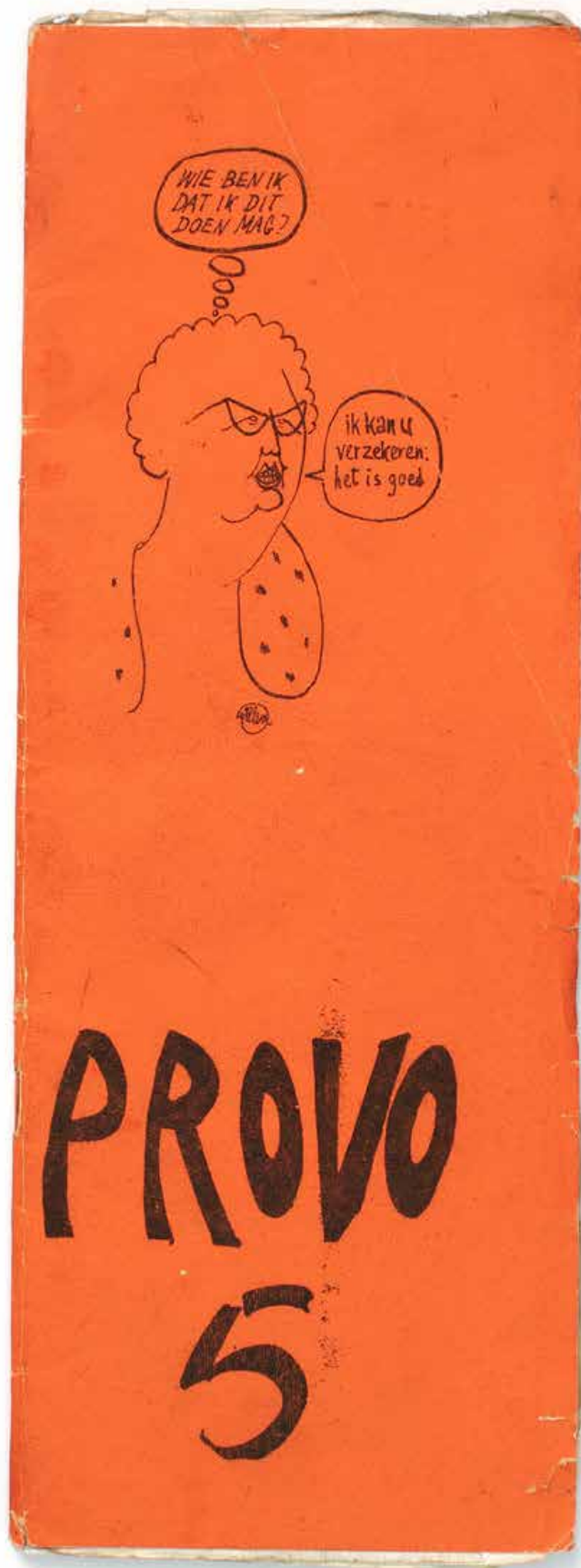
Provo, issue 9 (May 12, 1966). Offset-printed, 48 pages, 29.7 x 10.5 cm.

Shown here the back and front of the ninth issue of *Provo*, published around May 12, 1966, in an edition of 12,000.

Provo issue 10

Provo, issue 10 (June 30, 1966). Offset-printed, 40 pages, 29.7 x 10.5 cm.

Shown here the cover (back and front) of the tenth issue of *Provo*, published around June 30, 1966, in an edition of 20,000.



Provo issue 11

Provo, issue 11 (August 15, 1966). Offset-printed, 40 pages, 29.7 x 10.5 cm.

Shown here two variations (red on black, and black on red) of the front cover of issue 11, published around August 15, 1966 (in an edition of 20,000).

Provo issue 12

Provo, issue 12 (October 1, 1966). Offset-printed, 44 pages, 29.7 x 10.5 cm.

Shown here the cover (back and front) of issue 12 of *Provo*, published around October 1, 1966 (in an edition of 15,000).

Provo issue 13

Provo, issue 13 (January 10, 1967). Offset-printed, 12 pages, 59.4 x 21 cm.

Shown here the front cover of issue 13 of *Provo*, published around January 10, 1967 (in an edition of 10,000). The cover was designed by Swip Stolk, the brother of Rob Stolk. One of their earlier collaborations is the anarchist magazine *Barst*, from April 1965.

Provo issue 14

Provo, issue 14 (February 15, 1967). Offset-printed, 12 pages, 59.4 x 21 cm.

Shown here the front cover of issue 14, published around February 15, 1967 (in an edition of 10,000).

This particular issue of *Provo* already contained, within its paste-ups and transparent film negatives, the first signs of the 'Provo Likwidaatsie Kommissie' – the faction (headed by Rob Stolk) that wanted to 'liquidate' the movement from the inside-out.



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Lucht

GASOORLOG

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Subsidie

De regering van Noordrijn-Westfalen heeft
alle moeten bepalen, dat het autoverkeer in het Ruhrgebied zal worden
afgeleid, wanneer concentraties van koolmonoxyde en stikstofgas
meer dan 1 milligram zwaveldioxyde per kubieke meter lucht aantreffen.
Alleen kan deze concentratie dodelijke gevolgen hebben, zoals in
1904-1905 in Londen, althans door een dichte "smog" met een
concentratie van 50%.

koolmonoxyde

gas

gift

explosiemotor

1970 ruim 200.000 ton kool-
monoxyde zal leveren, plus 75.000
ton nitreuze gassen, en plus 150.000
ton heet en oververbrande auto-
stoffen.

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economisch

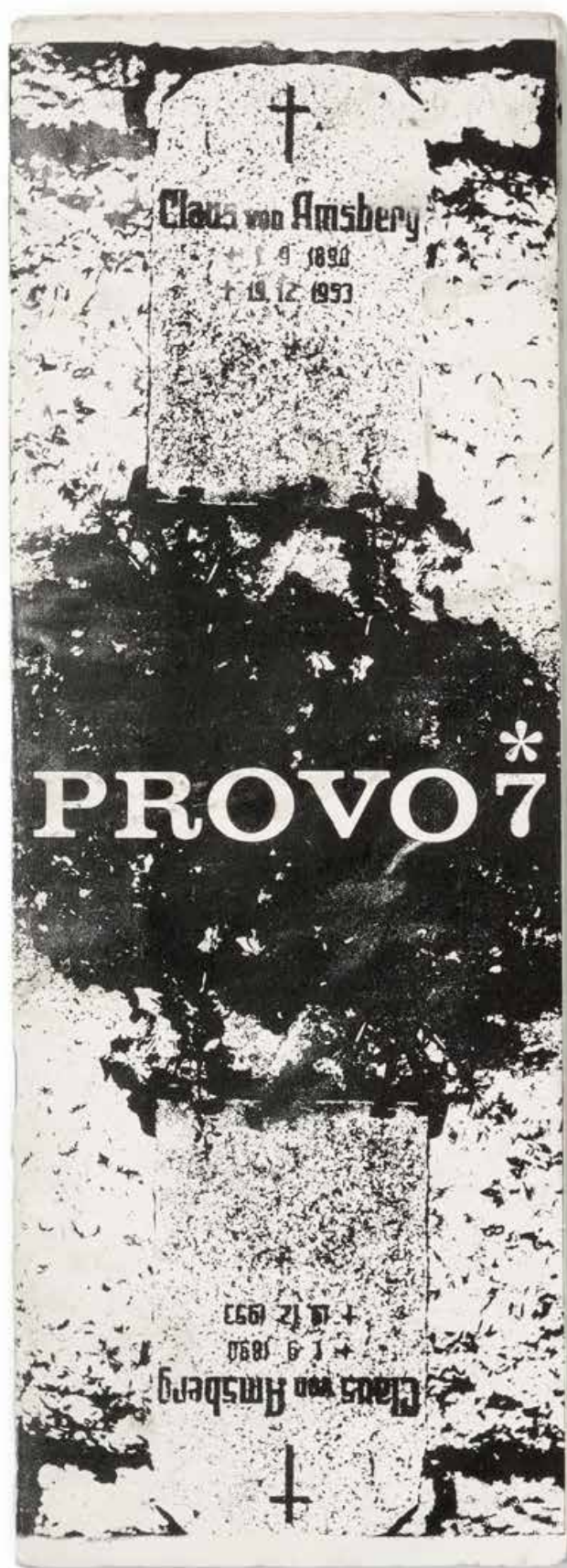
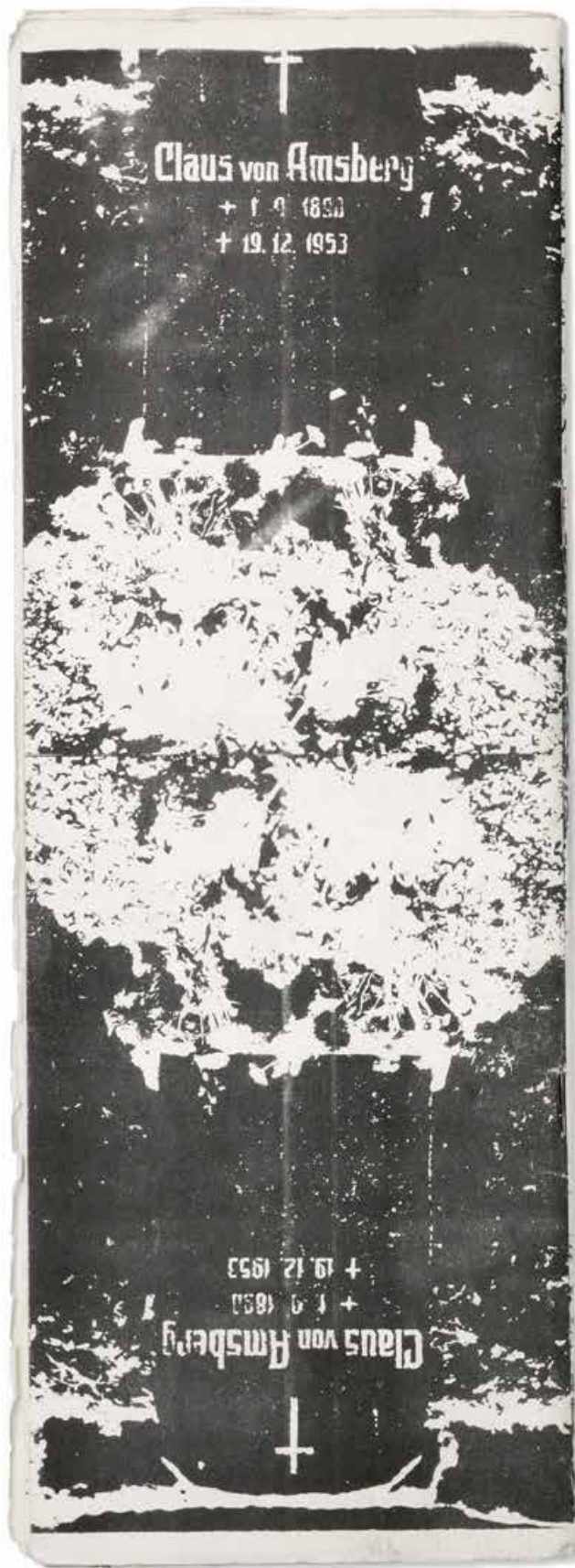
onschuldig afval



Is het nodig eerst precies te
weten wat men wil bestrijden
voordat men overgaat tot ingrij-
pende maatregelen om de lucht-
verontreiniging tegen te gaan?
Er zijn heel wat mensen — en
ook de redactie van deze krant —
hoort bij hen — die maar lie-
ver niet gewachten tot dat dulle
lijp is geworden waaraan afge-
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proeven nu maar wat dat vroe-
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PROVO'6

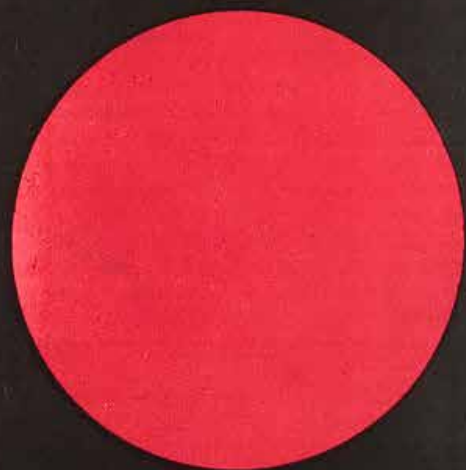




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PROVO



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Provo issue 15

Provo, issue 15 (March 17, 1967). Offset-printed, 16 pages, 59.4 x 21 cm.

Shown here the cover of issue 15 of Provo, published around March 17, 1967 (in an edition of 10,000). The front image was crudely based on the cover of issue 13 (originally designed by Swip Stolk).

Issue 15 turned out to be the movement's swan song – only a couple of weeks later (on May 13, 1967), Provo liquidated itself, in a self-described act of 'auto-provocation'.





Stem Provo – Keije Lachen

'Stem Provo – Keije Lachen' ('Vote Provo – Have a Laugh'), 1966. Photograph (detail) by Cor Jaring, as appeared on page 160 of *'Provo: De Geschiedenis van de Provotarische Beweging, 1965–1967'* (Meulenhoff Amsterdam, 1985).

As an anarchist movement, participating in the municipal elections wasn't the most obvious choice for Provo – after all, Provo fully believed in direct action, not representative democracy. However, in June 1966, Provo did participate in the Amsterdam elections – they figured that this could be their only shot at realizing their utopian urbanist agenda (the so-called 'White Plans'). And in fact, they did win a seat in the council – a seat that they would maintain until 1970, after which their seat was handed over to the Kabouterbeweging, an environmentalist post-Provo offshoot.

But even in its role as legit political party, Provo managed to deconstruct the spectacle of democracy. An example of this deconstruction can be found in this painted, wooden panel (125 x 185 cm), created by Rob Stolk in 1966. With a slogan that favored ludic strategies over rational motivations, and its bright CoBrA/Pop-Art aesthetics, this painting (here photographed as installed on the bridge at the corner of Leidsestraat and Prinsengracht, in Amsterdam) became an iconic image for Provo.

The painted board (one of many panels, situated all throughout Amsterdam) is shown here as installed next to a campaign poster of the PvdA, the established Labour Party. It is clearly visible how much the two graphic languages clash, and engage in a rhythmic game of statement and counter-statement.

It is interesting to note that Rob Stolk, the creator of this wooden panel (and one of the main founders of the Provo movement) couldn't be part of the actual political party – he was simply too young to be legally elected. Just like most other Provos in 1966, Rob was under 21. The list of candidates consisted of slightly older people, often coming from the periphery of Provo – the most illustrious being the artist Constant Nieuwenhuys.

The original wooden panel is currently part of the collection of the International Institute of Social History (IISG).



God, Nederland & Oranje (1966–1968), Ten issues, offset-printed. A5-sized, A4-sized, A3-sized. Approximately 16–20 pages per issue.

During its short existence (1965–1967), the Provo movement published several magazines – first of all, there was *Provo*, the monthly journal around which the whole movement revolved. Other Provo-produced titles included the weekly *Image*, and the ongoing series of pamphlets known as *Provokaties*. And finally, the Provo movement also published *God, Nederland & Oranje*, a bi-monthly cartoon-zine, steeped in hard-hitting satire.

Whereas other Provo publications were typically printed on the movement's own press, *God, Nederland & Oranje* was printed by Drukkerij Delta, an anarchist printing workshop located in The Hague.

Featuring contributors like Willem (Bernard Willem Holtrop), Willem Malsen, Ronald, De Wit, Pierre Roth and Topor, and published by De Parel van de Jordaan (Provo under another name), the main targets of the magazine were religion, nationalism, and monarchy (hence the title, 'God, The Netherlands & Orange'). Many of the issue were confiscated – and some contributors (such as publisher Hans Metz) were even arrested.

The most illustrious name that emerged from this magazine might be Willem (born Bernard Willem Holtrop) – who, after the liquidation of Provo in 1967, moved to Paris and became a well-established and award-winning comic artist, working for leftist journals such as *l'Enragé*, *Hara-Kiri*, *Libération*, *Charlie Mensuel*, and *Charlie Hebdo*.

Willem also happens to be the designer of the iconic 10 Maart – Dag van de Anarchie poster, which was published by Provo in 1966.



"The greatest modernizers inaugurate their career with a backward leap, and a renaissance proceeds through a return to the past, a recycling, and hence a revolution. [...] Behind the 're' of reformation, republic or revolution, there is a hand flicking through the pages of a book, from the end back to the beginning".

– Régis Debray ('Socialism and Print', 2007)

Researching the Provo movement, and its post-Provo offshoots, it is impossible not to be struck by the symbiotic relationship between the archivist and the activist – two roles that are fully dependent on each other. Activism generates archives, archives generate activism – and so forth.

Let's not forget that Provo, a movement that might appear to some people as phenomenon without history, was in fact very much inspired by the early socialist, anarchist, and pacifist movements that existed in the Netherlands between the First and Second World War (decades before the birth of Provo).

In Niek Pas' important book 'Imaazje: De Verbeelding van Provo, 1965–1967' (Wereldbibliotheek, 2003), there is a wonderful paragraph in which Rob Stolk recalls that, during his childhood years, he was very impressed by the book shelves of Van der Veen, the father of a friend. Through these shelves, Rob came across revolutionary thinkers such as Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846–1919), whose ideas would become very influential to Provo. In other words, it were book collections, libraries and archives that served as some of Provo's biggest inspirations.

And all throughout the actions of Provo, the archive continued to play an important role. Already during its existence, Provo actively documented itself – magazine articles were saved, photos were collected, scrapbooks were compiled.

During some of the Provo happenings that took place around Het Lieverdje (the statue at Spui Square), a large cardboard folder was carried around, adorned with a brick wall pattern. This folder contained a large collection of newspaper clippings, all on the subject of Provo. The role of this cardboard folder was almost ritual – it was placed against the statue, people dancing around it frantically,

bearing torches and slogans. Seen that way, the archive became the heart of the happening, the center of the movement itself. The archive was transformed into a battery, an accumulator, a generator of activism.

A very concrete example of this (activism being generated by the archive) took place during the final stages of Provo. Immediately after the 1967 liquidation (or better said, self-liquidation) of Provo, Rob Stolk and a couple of his close friends decided to sell their personal Provo material to the library of the University of Amsterdam (UvA). This act (the selling of the archive) was certainly meant as a conceptual, artistic gesture: as the “final provocation”. A special committee was invented (the ‘Provo Liquidatie Commissie’), and managed (after bluffing that an American university was interested in buying the archive) to make a deal with the University of Amsterdam – in total, a sum of 13.010,- guilders was paid for the archive.

The transfer of this archive was actually captured on film. The movie (quite proto-punk in its conception – part *Great Rock & Roll Swindle*, part *Great Train Robbery*) shows Rob and his friends, dressed as gangsters, driving around in Amsterdam while carrying plastic machine guns and a large trunk filled with archival material. After the trunk was delivered at the university, the Provos (still dressed as mobsters, and carrying toy guns) went to the bank to deposit the money – where they were immediately arrested by police officers who thought they stumbled onto an actual bank robbery.

Adding even more to the conceptual, ludic (and self-mythologizing) nature of the transaction was the list of absurdist conditions stated by the Provo Likwiedaatsie Kommissie. For the next five years, none of the material was allowed to be reproduced – while for a period of twenty-five years, the correspondence (the part of the archive that was gifted rather than sold) could only be visited with strict permission of the Kommissie. At the same time, all members of the Kommissie (Rob Stolk, Loe/Lou van Nimwegen, Robert Jasper Grootveld, and Steef Davidson) had unlimited access to the archive.

In Derek Taylor’s ‘It Was Twenty Years Ago Today’ (Bantam Press, 1987), Rob describes the transaction as follows:

“In fact it wasn’t an archive at all, just some scattered documentation, if you want to call it that. We spread a rumour via some journalist that the Provo archive would be sold to an American university, so the University of Amsterdam decided to buy the archive itself. They paid 13.010 guilders for it, at that time a huge amount of money, and then they started a real archive. A lot of people were interested in the movement but heard about it only when Provo was already dead so for us it was really useful – we could say ‘Go and read about it!’...”

Now the University has a big department with all kinds of material and publications of those times, from any country in the world where something was happening. So now there is a big archive”.

From the 13.010,- guilders that the Provo Likwiedaatsie Kommissie received from the University of Amsterdam, 3.000,- guilders were donated to Robert Jasper Grootveld, and his Lowland Weed Company. The rest of the money (10.000,- guilders) was used to found (and fund) the ‘Stichting ter Bevordering van een Goed en Goedkoop Leven’ (‘Foundation for the Promotion of Good and Cheap Living’), an action committee that played a crucial role in both the early squatters’ movement (Woningburo De Kraker) and Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt (the resistance against the total demolition of the Amsterdam’s Nieuwmarkt area).

In other words, it was the death of Provo (and the act of selling of the archive) that enabled these new movements to take place – like a Provotarian phoenix rising from its ashes. A very clear illustration of activism being generated by an archive that was generated by activism.

The Provo archive remained in the library of the University in Amsterdam until 1990 (carefully maintained by people like archivist-activist-artist Tjebbe van Tijen), until it was transferred to the International Institute of Social History (IISG), where it is currently accessible to the public – and hopefully functions as a new generator for both activism and archivism.

This twelfth and last issue of ARTZINES is the printed version of an online archive made by Amsterdam-based graphic design studio Experimental Jetset (consisting of Marieke Stolk, Erwin Brinkers and Danny van den Dungen) on the subject of the Provo movement (and its post-Provo offshoots). Within this research, the main subject is the relationship between Provo, the city, and the printing press.

The publications of the Provo movement that are featured here are not zines (even if they were self-published), and they are not made by artists or to be works of art. So why is the last issue of ARTZINES about them? The publications featured here are revolutionary, and can be considered as proto-zines in the sense that they were zines before zines, or publications that have all the characteristics of zines, but are not necessarily considered as such by the people who made them.

They also have a very strong anarchist agenda, that places them as one of the main inspiration of the punk zines DIY ethos. And of course, what makes them relevant in the context of the ARTZINES series is the design practice of the people who created the online archive, the designers of Experimental Jetset who kindly accepted to see their blog printed as a zine and to answer a few questions.

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So far, this research resulted in a series of exhibitions and installations, most notably 'Two or Three Things I Know About Provo' (W139, 2011), 'Two or Three Things / The Brno Edition' (Moravian Gallery 25th Brno Biennial 2012), and the poster series 'Concrete Provo' ('Yes Yes Yes' group show at Colli Independent Art Space, 2015). 'Provo Station: Models for a Provotarian City', is the most recent installation, took place between March 18 and May 22, 2016, at Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig.

A figure that plays an important role in this narrative is Rob Stolk (1946–2001), one of the main founders of Provo. Coming from a socialist working class background, Stolk was involved in activism from a very young age. His involvement in Provo forced him to become a printer; since mainstream printing offices refused to handle the subversive and sometimes illegal Provo material, he had no other option than to print these publications himself. Reflecting on this situation, Stolk often quoted

American journalist A. J. Liebling: "Freedom of the press is for those who own one".

After the liquidation of Provo, Rob Stolk remained an important figure in various post-Provo movements, most notably in the early squatters' scene (Woningburo de Kraker), and in Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt (the action committee that successfully protested against the demolition of the Amsterdam Nieuwmarkt district and surrounding areas). In 1969, he was involved in the occupation of Het Maagdenhuis (the main building of the University of Amsterdam), operating a printing press from within the occupied building.

From 1976 to 1983, he published the satirical/historical magazine 'De Tand des Tijds'. In the 1980s and 1990s, he became one of the most prolific cultural printers in Amsterdam, until his untimely death in 2001, when he was only 55 years of age.

In your recent exhibition Superstructure at RMIT University Melbourne, you made an installation composed of four cities (The Constructivist City, The Situationist City, The Provotarian City & The Post-Punk City.) What place do these four (sub-) cultural movements hold in your daily practice? How do they influenced you?

All these movements have influenced and inspired us, directly and indirectly, each in their own way – and they certainly continue to inform our daily practice. It would take us too long to go through these movements one by one, and precisely explain just how these movements have affected us – but maybe we can say something about these movements in general.

What all these movements have in common (and what we find ultimately so inspiring) is the fact that they all tried to somehow establish a total synthesis of art and the everyday. They didn't see art as an isolated sphere, separated from society – instead, they tried to turn society into an artwork in itself.

So we believe that this idea (the synthesis of art and the everyday) is the one characteristic that holds all these movements together. It's an idea that can be found in all modernist movements – from Dada to Surrealism, from Bauhaus to De Stijl, from

Fluxus to Pop Art, etc.

A clear example of this synthesis (of art and the everyday) can be found in the way in which the Provo movement used the city as a platform for language:

Provotarian magazines and pamphlets were distributed in the streets, posters were pasted to the walls, performances took place on public squares (and around public statues), slogans were being chanted, and protesters filled the roads with smoke signals (one of the oldest languages in the world). Through these graphic gestures, the city was turned into a public infrastructure for communication, a machine for multiplying and distributing ideas – in short, a metaphysical printing press.

We think it is exactly this idea, of turning the everyday into a collective artwork (a 'Gesamtkunstwerk', so to speak), that we find so inspiring.

When describing these modernist tactics, we often quote Marx and Engels (from 'The Holy Family', 1844):

"If humans are made by their environment, than this environment has to be made human".

To us, this sentence remains the most accurate definition of modernism, of socialism, of art, of design – and of culture itself.

(Having said that – we also are quite interested in art that functions in more 'anti-humanist' ways. Art that tries to escape from society, and behaves as if it is 'autonomous', no matter how impossible that is.

Art that is anti-social, anti-democratic, and anti-engaged – l'Art pour l'Art, so to speak. We think this notion of art is quite valuable as well, and also plays an important part within the modernist maelstrom. But that's a different story – for another time).

Those four movements have a very strong political color. Would you say that your way of making graphic design is political?

We think that the notion we described above (the synthesis of art and the everyday) is the most political gesture there is. It refers directly to the essence of Marxism – the liberation of the senses (or, as Marx

described it, "the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities").

And we would certainly say that graphic design plays an crucial role within this synthesis (of art and the everyday).

After all, modern graphic design is a discipline that emerged from movements such as Bauhaus and De Stijl, and still functions as an important interface between art and industry, between ideology and pop-culture, between propaganda and entertainment, between poetry and pornography. Graphic design exists exactly in the area where all these fields and forces overlap. In fact, graphic design IS the synthesis of art and the everyday.

So we do feel that graphic design is inherently political.

However, when it comes to our own work, we do feel that this political intent doesn't necessarily manifest itself in overt political messages, or in blatant utilitarianism.

We guess our work is political in a more abstract way – in our practice, we try to explore the political potential of the aesthetic dimension itself, mostly through conceptual gestures and self-referential interventions.

To speak with Benjamin, we try to "politicize aesthetics", rather than "aestheticize politics".

Which is a rather difficult and complicated position to take, and also very misunderstood. Critics often describe our work as 'anti-political', or 'non-political' – which is ironic, as we see our own practice as highly political. But that's life, we guess.

In your research about Provo, you focused on the relationship between Provo, the city, and the printing press. What do you think makes Provo relevant today?

We think that Provo is still relevant today, in countless ways. But if we'd have to focus on the relationship between the movement, the city, and printing press, we think that one of the most important lessons that can be learned from Provo has to do with the communicative power of public space.

We live in a time where more and more information is being distributed through online media – internet, social media, etc. Obviously, all these

platforms seem quite public, and democratic – but in our view, they are far from that. As we once mentioned in an earlier interview (in *Print Magazine*, October 2011):

“In our view, print is still a more public medium. If a poster is hanging in the street, it is seen by every passer-by in more or less the same way. Sure, the interpretation of the poster will differ from person to person – but grosso modo, the poster itself will appear in roughly the same way to every viewer, regardless of his/her class, race, gender, age, personal preferences, etc.

This is different within the context of internet, where websites and -pages conform themselves instantly to cater to the personal tastes and preferences of the individual viewer. Google Search results change from person to person, the advertisements that clutter online profiles are specifically targeted towards the viewer, etc. etc. This makes the online environment ultimately an individualistic, isolated experience, despite the promise of ‘being connected’.

What Provo has shown us is the inherently social-democratic dimension of both printed matter and public space. A poster on a wall, a slogan on a banner, a pamphlet distributed in the streets, a performance on a public square – these remain important gestures. We should try to see the city again as a platform for public communication, as the internet seems more broken every day.

What is your relation with zines and self-publishing? Do you have any specific zine that inspired you?

We come from a fanzine background. In the ‘80s, when we were teenagers, all three of us were involved in those typical post-punk subcultures (new wave, psychobilly, two-tone ska, hardcore

punk, etc.) – and zines were a big part of those scenes. Fanzines have always been around in our lives – we have been reading them, and we have been making them.

Already in the late-’80s, some of the mini-comics that we produced were reviewed in bigger zines such as *Factsheet Five* and *Maximum Rock & Roll*.

And in the ‘90s, when we were in our twenties (and were studying at the Rietveld Academy), we continued making zines. For example, between 1994–1996, we published a punkzine titled *PHK* (to be pronounced as either ‘Phuk’ or ‘Puke’)...

So we do see our graphic design practice as a logical extension of our fanzine background.

As for our favorite zines... Off the top of our heads, some of the zines we’ve been reading (in the late-’80s to the late ‘90s), and that have influenced us, are (in no particular order):

Murder Can Be Fun, *Drew*, *Dishwasher*, *Beer Frame*, *Ben is Dead*, *Cometbus*, *Motorbooty*, *Gearhead*, *Speed Kills*, *Skate Muties*, *Roller derby*, *Answer Me*, *Sic Teen*, *Vague*, *Maximum Rock & Roll*, *Factsheet Five*, *Ugly Things*, *Giant Robot*, *Grand Royal*, *Bunnyhop*, etc.

Why is the project called *Two or Three Things I Know About Provo*?

On the one hand, it’s obviously a silly reference to Godard (*Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle*, 1967).

But more importantly, it’s a way to show that our knowledge of Provo is ultimately incomplete, subjective, and fragmentary (and rightly so).

In the end, we only know a few things about Provo – we don’t want to claim that our interpretation of Provo is objective, complete, or authoritative.

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