A CITY

EATING

(IN LESS THAN
10 MINUTES)

ITSELF

by
affect
lab

A PROJECT BY affect lab
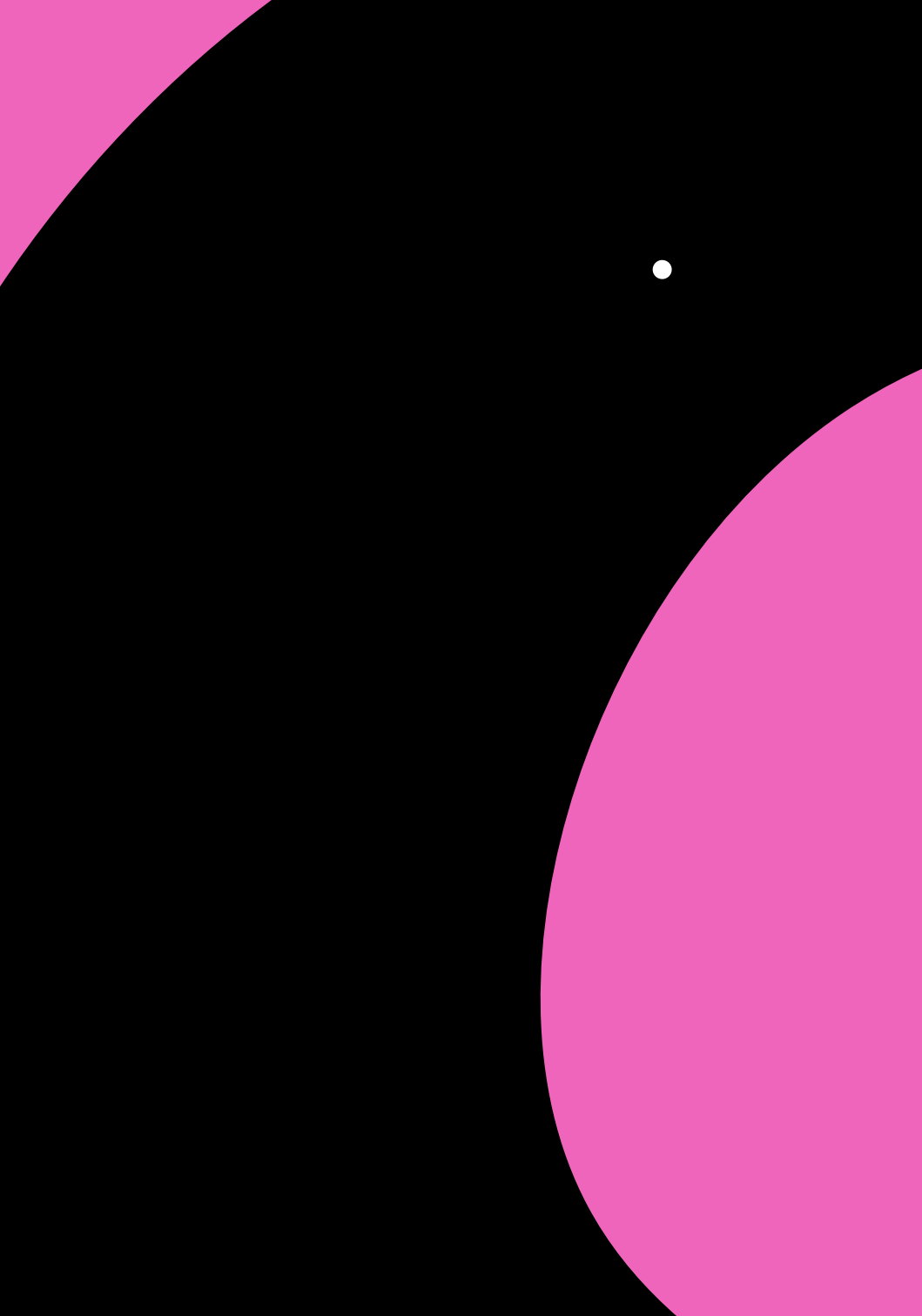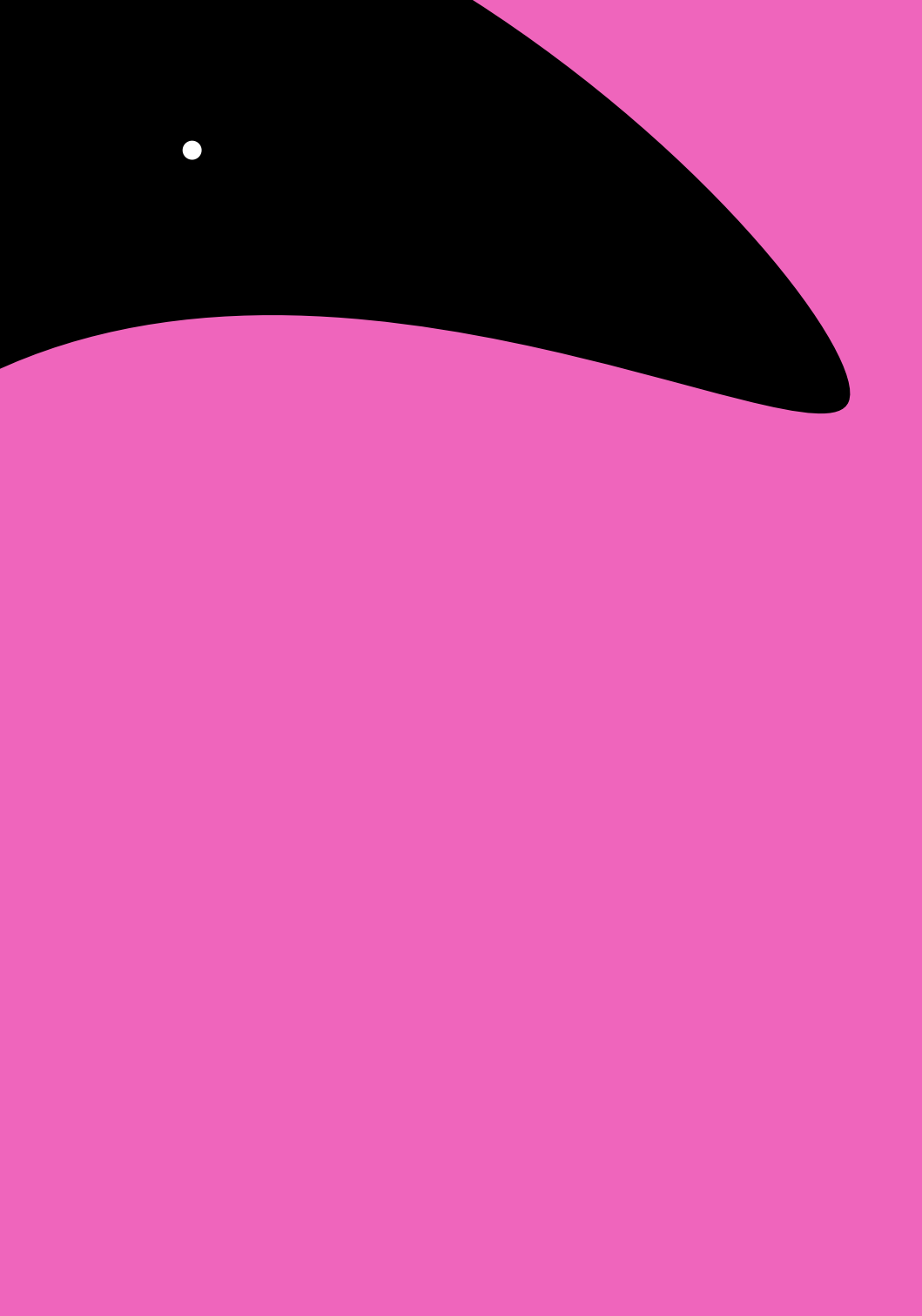
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DEFINITIONS

DARK STORE

A dark store is a distribution centre that is exclusively dedicated to fulfilling online shopping orders. Inside, it typically resembles the layout of a supermarket, featuring aisles with shelves, fridges, and freezers organised for specific product types. From the outside, these dark stores have a nondescript appearance, with limited or no signage that would associate them with any specific company.

The term 'dark store' originates from a common characteristic of these buildings – windows where the views are obscured by opaque glass or window foils.

The defining characteristics of a dark store are always evolving. In response to new zoning laws, flash delivery companies in Amsterdam have tried to redefine their dark stores' function. To avoid being labelled as such, they have started offering a limited selection of products for walk-in customers.

FLASH DELIVERY

Known as 'flitsbezorging' in Dutch, flash delivery refers to delivery services that aim to fulfil customers' orders in less than 10 minutes. It is a form of quick commerce – the phenomenon of order fulfillment within one to two hours. However, flash delivery refers to those specific delivery companies that take the promise of speed even further. The use of the word 'flash' implies the lightning-fast speed at which these deliveries are fulfilled.

In Amsterdam, flash delivery companies have faced challenges in keeping up with their promise of delivery in under 10 minutes. New zoning laws have pushed dark stores out of residential areas, resulting in longer delivery times for riders to reach customers.

Examples of companies offering flash delivery in Amsterdam include Gorillas, Zapp, Getir, Flink, and Gopuff. Other terms used to describe flash delivery are 'instant delivery' and 'ultrafast delivery'.

PICKER

Picker is the colloquial name given to an individual who works in a dark store. Pickers put together customers' orders by picking or selecting the required items from the shelves inside a dark store.

PLATFORM

A platform is a digital infrastructure that serves as an intermediary, allowing various groups of users and consumers to access or interact with a specific product or service. It facilitates connections, information sharing, transactions, or access to specific functionalities. Platforms can bring together different parties and help them achieve their objectives more efficiently than they could independently. They rely heavily on data to quantify social, cultural, and behavioural practices to inform their operations.

Companies such as Amazon, Airbnb, Uber, and Facebook are often referred to as platforms. Their products and services are digitally mediated, cloud-based, and data driven.[1]

1   Rodgers and Moore, "Platform Urbanism: An Introduction."

QUICK COMMERCE

Quick commerce, sometimes referred to as 'Q-commerce', is a specific type of E-commerce (electronic commerce). Its defining feature is speed, as deliveries are swiftly fulfilled in under one or two hours.

RIDER

Rider is the colloquial term used to describe delivery couriers. These individuals are responsible for transporting orders from the dark store to customers' delivery addresses (homes, workplaces, public spaces). Riders often wear uniforms and carry identifiable branded delivery backpacks while riding branded bicycles.

WHEN

A CITY

⟵→EATS

ITSELF…

…THE NEIGHBOURHOOD WILL TELL US WHY

Around December 2019 a dark store opened almost overnight at the end of my street. What used to be a car repair garage was suddenly a delivery warehouse with cladded windows. I noticed it immediately. Admittedly, it was hard to miss – with the urgent beeping sounds from inside and cyclists huddling together outside in matching bright pink delivery jackets. It was here, in this windowless warehouse in the east of Amsterdam, that affect lab began the project *A City Eating Itself (in less than 10 minutes)*.

Initially, our curiosity about dark stores was sparked by the impact they were having on the typology of street facades in the city. But soon this curiosity morphed into a much deeper concern for what was happening in neighbourhood communities (in part) due to the rise of flash delivery services. So, at the heart of this book we are driven by one key question: *what influence do flash delivery services have on the social fabric of neighbourhoods in Amsterdam?*

We started by issuing a haunting collection of field notes, written anonymously under the title *Sensory Field Notes: The Diary of a Dark Store Worker*. It was both a fascinating and unsettling read, revealing the precarious working conditions of a student rider and picker at a flash delivery company in Amsterdam. By this time (2021), quick commerce was booming. *Forbes* magazine estimated the industry was worth €23 billion. The COVID-19 pandemic offered the perfect conditions for companies like Flink, Gorillas, Getir, and Zapp to thrive. They succeeded under lockdown conditions, when "regular" stores didn't have capacity to deliver or couldn't even open their doors. While we were restricted to our homes under a curfew, riders

criss-crossed the city delivering anything from a toothbrush to a pineapple at midnight.

But, things did change. Pandemic measures slowly lifted in 2022 and brick-and-mortar shops reopened. Yet, flash delivery services seemed set to stay in the city. While the average resident[1] of Amsterdam has 600 metres or less to walk to their closest supermarket, some consumers still prefer to have their groceries delivered directly to the doorstep. The convenience of these pandemic-era services proved to be remarkably sticky. As local city councillor Elisabeth IJmker reminds us: the promise of flash delivery is not ultimately about grocery shopping but rather about saving time. Promising time to its customers – time for family, time for work, time for yourself – flash delivery seemed to be taking root in many neighbourhoods in Amsterdam.

[1] This average is problematic, as it ignores the discrepancies in access to supermarkets across different neighbourhoods in Amsterdam.

A rider out on delivery on Amsterdam's Admiraal de Ruijterweg. 2023.

Ever since the launch of our project *Good Neighbours* a few years ago, the team at affect lab has been interested in the neighbourhood as a microcosm for understanding more macro issues in a city (and a society). So we were especially troubled by media reports of tensions flaring up between neighbours and dark stores in local streets in Amsterdam. The most extreme of these took place in the Fagelstraat in the west of the city. Through close consultation with a neighbour in the street we were able to conduct interviews with residents, a dark store manager, and an official from the city who was directly involved in this conflict. Our aim was to get to the bottom of what happened[2] because it goes to the core of city-making: *how do people in Amsterdam balance the needs of individuals with the ideals of a broader collective?*

2   See Chapter 5: The Platform Next Door.

When technology recedes into the background in neighbourhoods, and we stop noticing it, this is when we need to be at our most vigilant. Because it's here in the silent recesses of technological "progress" that social cohesion and a sense of belonging can come under threat. affect lab's response to this threat was a creative intervention, driven by the power of first-hand accounts drawn from neighbours, dark store workers, and alchemised by the voices of fellow urbanists and architects we know and trust. Our ultimate response took the form of a playful fictional audio-led walk pulling on our research as a narrative starting point. The walk invited neighbours to post-process the events that happened in their street. It urged participants to consider the future for the neighbourhood and opened up the topic of the dark store conflict to the wider community of Amsterdam for reflection and conversation about flash delivery.

What you hold in your hands right now documents affect lab's exploration over the past two years. The book is crafted from our position as both creative practitioners and researchers who care and have much

love for the city of Amsterdam. Our hope is that this cultural moment does not simply pass us by without critical contemplation. While the future potential of the flash delivery's industry seems to be rapidly waning, the new configurations it introduced – a sense of acceleration, rampant individualism and a corrosive effect on neighbourhood social cohesion – remain as an urban residue that we still need to engage with.

Dr. Natalie Dixon
Cultural Insights Director, affect lab

POSTSCRIPT: After much consideration, affect lab opted to write this book in English as a gesture to our international contemporaries: our fellow thinkers in the global urbanism, architectural and artistic communities who are grappling with urgent questions about the influence of flash delivery on citylife. Amsterdam provides a very unique (and in some ways unprecedented) case study for this phenomenon which we believe is vital to share as widely as possible.

FROM ←

CONVENTION

↳ TO

CONVENIENCE

A CULTURAL HISTORY OF FOOD DELIVERY SERVICES IN AMSTERDAM

WORDS BY MINNIE BATES

Flash delivery is the latest cultural shift in an ever-evolving landscape of consumption, but not everything about it is new. With deliveries dictated by speed and riders peddling on branded bicycles, many of its features are reminiscent of historic grocery shopping practices.

Throughout history, design and technological innovation have continuously influenced the way in which we shop for groceries, often in subtle or indirect ways. Yet, today, we are witnessing a less-than-subtle transformation thanks to flash delivery companies like Getir, Gorillas, and Flink.

A City Eating Itself began with a two-month-long desk research phase, tracing the lineage of design and technological innovations that have influenced our food shopping habits. Our objective in this chapter is to delve into the historical evolution of food delivery, beginning with the story of the Milkmaid from Waterland.

P. van den Berge delin: et fecit   de Lespine exc: Cum Privilegio Ord: Hollandiæ et West Frisiæ

Laittiere de Waterlandt

Peeter Persoy Excudit.

'*Melkmeid uit Waterland*'. Pieter van den Berge. c.1669-1689. Courtesy of the Rijksmuseum.

THE MILKMAID

Throughout the 17th to 20th centuries, the *Waterlandse Melkschuit* sailed the waters from Waterland to Amsterdam's milk market. A Melkschuit was a specially crafted fast sailing ship, designed for transporting milk barrels. They would make the crossing over choppy waters as quickly as possible to guarantee the freshness of the milk. Efficiency was a top priority as they navigated the treacherous seas.

Once the Melkschuit arrived in Amsterdam, some of the milk was sold at the milk market to local vendors. The rest of it was sold by intrepid milkmaids, who sailed aboard the Melkschuit, and sometimes even lent a hand rowing the boats. They sold the milk door-to-door, balancing a yoke on their shoulders, with two large wooden barrels full of milk swinging on either side of their bodies.

The milkmaid would transfer the milk straight from her wooden barrels into the customer's own container. In this sense, the transaction was completely packaging free.

THE ANIMAL AND CART

Slowly but surely, sellers upgraded from the old-fashioned door-to-door deliveries on foot to faster, easier, and more convenient modes of transportation. The milkmen, bakers, greengrocers, and butchers continued to visit customers' homes, but now they used specially equipped wagons pulled by animals. For a long time, the horse and cart was a popular means for delivering groceries.

For those traders who couldn't afford a horse and cart there was an innovative alternative – the dog cart, or *Hondenkar*. These relied on draft dogs, who pulled goods through Amsterdam's cobbled streets. The dog cart peaked in popularity around 1860, when roads were flattened and smoothed, and pulling a cart became easier. However, due to their inherent cruelty, the dog cart did not have the same longevity as the horse and cart. In 1875, Amsterdam became one of the first municipalities to introduce licences that resulted in their eventual disappearance from the streets around 1920.

'*Eerste Schinkelstraat 10-20*'. Author unknown. Date unknown. Courtesy of Stadsarchief Amsterdam.

THE BUTCHER'S BIKE

In the first half of the 20th century, bicycles played an important role in the smaller door-to-door deliveries. These bicycles were equipped with wicker baskets or storage boxes mounted to their frame of the bike. Often, they featured a sign advertising the business they belonged to, either on the front of the basket or built into the bicycle frame.

This model of bicycle with a mounted basket is commonly known as a Butcher's bike. The butcher sent his butcher boys, *slagersjongen,* out to take orders from residents. The following day, after the slaughter, the butcher boys returned to customers' homes with their orders.

While the name of the bike comes from the butcher, the name of the basket, *bakkersmanden,* comes from the baker. In the early mornings at the bakery, riders collected warm loaves of bread, placed them in the wicker baskets, and delivered them from house to house.

'Prent van slagersjongen op de fiets, met gedicht over de jongen 'in dienst van 't slagersgild''.
Author unknown. c. 1920. Courtesy of Stadsarchief Amsterdam.

8. DE SLAGERSJONGEN.

Nadruk verboden

Een schrik der wandelaars,
Een racer op de fiets,
Een wervelwind gelijk,
Zich storende aan niets.

Wordt hij door menigeen
Gevreesd — en toch gewild
Als trouwe comparant,
In dienst van 't slagersgild!

THE LONG JOHN

The Long John was invented in Denmark during the 1930s. This model of cargo bike, known in Dutch as a *bakfiets,* was characterised by the elongated distance between the front and back wheels. It also had a long cargo platform positioned between the front wheel and the driver.

Bakfietsen made it much easier to transport large loads of produce on a bike. The milkman could now transport racks of milk bottles all the while carrying a wicker basket on the front of the bike.

THE IJZEREN HOND

The 1950s and 1960s was a period of vehicular change. Motorised delivery vehicles grew in popularity, and one peculiar name stole the show – the Iron Dog, or *IJzeren Hond* – named after its predecessor, the *hondenkar*.

An Iron Dog is a three-wheel vehicle. The engine was attached to the front wheel, allowing it to rotate a full 360 degrees. It didn't go fast – the speed was limited to walking speed, which meant the peddler could walk in front of it, steering it with a rod positioned above the front wheel.

Ultimately, as the 1960s drew to a close, the iron hounds and the cargo bikes were replaced by more comfortable and faster modes of delivery transport.

New vehicles were developed with gears and a semi-open cab to offer more comfort for the peddler on their daily trips around the city. With a seat at the front and a steering wheel, sellers no longer had to walk or carry the weight of their delivery.

'Opdracht Van Hulzen, melkboer in nauwe straat, minder verkeer'. Jack de Nijs. 1967. Courtesy of The Nationaal Archief. | *'Sam van Houtenstraat'.* Jusopo Muhamad Arsath Ro'is. 1960. Courtesy of Stadsarchief Amsterdam.

PALAU DJAWA
serveert U een echte
rijsttafel.
Wij bezorgen ook aan huis
L. Leidsedwarsstraat 5—7,
b/d Leidsestr, Tel. 65891.

Advertisement for Palau Djawa's takeaway service. Published in the Algemen Handelsblad. 1957. Courtesy of Koninklijke Bibliotheek.

THE TAKEAWAY

In the 1950s, restaurants began to advertise their take-away services, like this one from the restaurant Palau Djawa in the Lange Leidsedwarsstraat. The ad reads, "Let us deliver rijsttafel [rice and multiple side dishes] to your home" – an appealing invitation to enjoy a feast in the comfort of your own home.

Takeaways, though not a form of grocery delivery, played a fundamental role in the evolution of flash delivery., and had a lasting impact on grocery delivery more widely. They showed us that convenience is key – for a prepared meal or an order of fruit and vegetables for the week.

THE SELF SERVICE SUPERMARKET

In 1942, a milkman named Dirk van den Broek opened his first milk shop in Amsterdam's Mercatorplein. Subsequently, in 1953, he opened his first supermarket.

The 1960s saw the impact that supermarkets had on door-to-door salesmen. Between 1964 and 1984, sales of milk by milkmen fell from a 90% share of the market to a mere 20%.

The model of the supermarket revolutionised the shopping experience in two important ways. First, it was self-service, which meant customers didn't have to wait in line at different counters to ask for products. Customers could now stroll down shopping aisles and handpick their own groceries directly from the shelves. Second, the supermarket also allowed customers to collect pre-packaged items which didn't need to be weighed and then packed.

This marked a shift towards a more individualised shopping experience. Interaction with the shop assistant behind each counter became limited, as the customer no longer required assistance to get the items, gaining more control over their shopping experiences.

View inside Dirk's shop in Mercatorplein – the first self service supermarket in Amsterdam. Author unknown. Date unknown. Courtesy of Dirk.

Albert Heijn advertisement promoting the members' discount on refrigerators. Published in *Het Parool*. 1962. Courtesy of Koninklijke Bibliotheek.

THE REFRIGERATOR

In the 1960s, the Dutch supermarket chain Albert Heijn announced a members' discount on a very important piece of technology that would change grocery shopping – and particularly its frequency – forever. The refrigerator! Customers with a membership card could purchase this essential appliance at 50% off. This sparked a trend towards widespread refrigerator ownership.
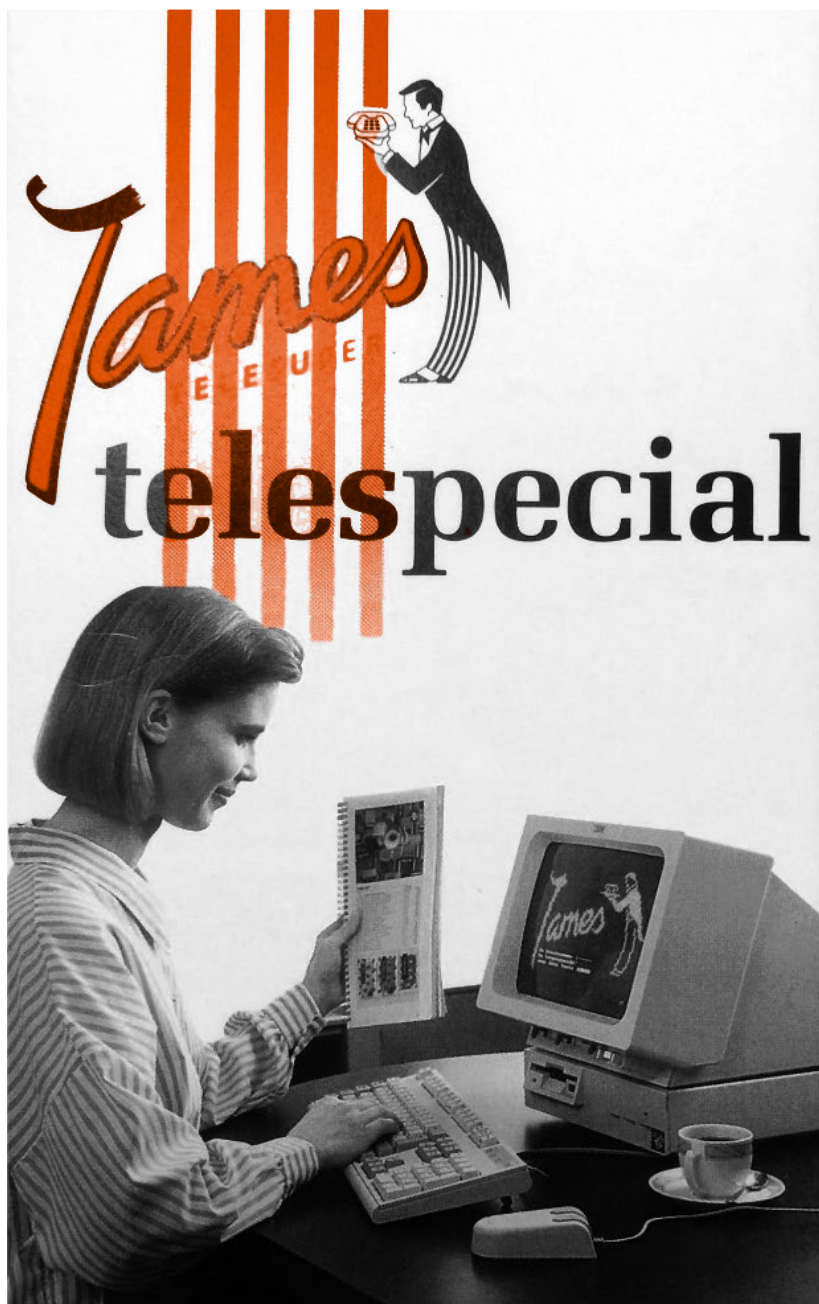
The powerful combination of refrigerator and car facilitated a new shopping culture – the era of weekly shopping. Daily grocery shopping was no longer necessary, as you could now buy enough to fill your car boot and stock your fridge. The supermarket continued to grow in popularity and was now the ultimate destination for all your grocery needs, a one-stop shop for everything.

THE HOME SHOPPING SERVICE

The 1980s saw the emergence of online or 'remote' banking. Right in the middle of this digital revolution, the Dutch company James Telesuper launched a home shopping service. It allowed customers to order supermarket items via telephone or videotex – an interactive communication system of the late 20th century.

James Telesuper served the Amsterdam, Haarlem and Den Haag areas from a single distribution centre in Heemstede. However, people weren't quite ready to embrace this futuristic grocery shopping concept yet. Even towards the end of the 1980s, business was slow, as consumers resisted the novelty of telephone grocery shopping.

In 1991, James Telesuper became the Albert Heijn home delivery service ('Thuisservice'). Albert Heijn Thuisservice continued to struggle, particularly because the distribution centre in Heemstede was ultimately closed. Instead, orders were now picked in the regular supermarkets, heavily burdening the supermarket staff.

Liever uit eten?
Op Dinner Site vind je meer dan 10.000 restaurants in heel Nederland.

11.08. Wat is Thuisbezorgd.NL?
Thuisbezorgd is al vier jaar de marktleider in het online eten bestellen in Nederland. Wij zorgen ervoor dat je bestelling aankom bij een brede keuze aan bezorgrestaurants. De bestelling komt altijd aan, je hoeft je dus niet ongerust te maken over j maaltijd. Mocht men nu vanwege bijvoorbeeld weersomstandigheden niet kunnen bezorgen dan melden we dat even. Dus.. wa let je? Je bent maar een paar klikken weg van een lekkere maaltijd!

Vertel het je vrienden!
Tevreden over Thuisbezorgd.NL en denk je dat je vrienden ook graag online pizza, shoarma en chinees willen bestellen? Verte het dan door! Klik hier om je vrienden een email te sturen.

THE TAKEAWAY WEBSITE

While Albert Heijn and its competitors were trying to resolve the problem of supermarket deliveries, Jitse Groen was busy at work, and in 2000, he launched Thuisbezorgd.nl – *'de eten-bestelsite'*.

After experiencing difficulty ordering food online from local restaurants, Groen built a platform to satisfy our cravings and bring food right to our doorsteps. Initially, he wanted to deliver a wider variety of consumer goods but soon noticed high demand for food deliveries.

Other start-ups like MaxFoodMarket, Smaak.nl, and Truus.nl dived into this promising market. The expectations were high. However, the takeaway platforms struggled to attract enough customers. Shopping via the internet was still a new concept for most Dutch people, and familiarity took time.

THE DECADE OF TECH TRANSFORMATION

Between 2003 and 2008, three critical technological advancements profoundly influenced the future of grocery delivery.

Around 2003, broadband internet became commonplace in Dutch homes, boosting online food sales for both groceries and takeaways.

In 2005, iDEAL launched – a new online payment method that offered a universally accepted and low-cost way to pay for goods in the Netherlands.

In 2008, Apple and Google both launched their App stores – which suddenly gave customers access to an online treasury of apps made by third-party developers. The late 2000s witnessed a boom in 'On-demand' culture that shook multiple industries, from taxis and accommodation to dating and streaming services. And, of course, food delivery services.

Suddenly, with the app in their hands, the proximity between customers and their groceries became closer and closer. At the same time, the supermarket itself was in equally close proximity. According to the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, in 2014, people in the Netherlands had to travel an average of 900 metres to reach the nearest supermarket.

Picnic delivery vehicle in Amsterdam Oost. 2023.

THE 'APP-ONLY SUPERMARKET'

Despite the close proximity of customers to the super-market, Picnic emerged in 2015, spotting an apparent gap in the market for home delivery. This 'app-only supermarket', with no stores of its own, started its services in Amersfoort in 2015, adding Almere, Utrecht, and Den Haag in quick succession. It finally arrived in Amsterdam in 2018.

There's something special about the design of the Picnic delivery van. They're tall, narrow, and heavily loaded. While the main aim of this design is to prevent the van from obstructing roads when they make deliveries, it's also playfully reminiscent of the small milk delivery vehicles pictured on page 25.

A Gorillas dark store on Amsterdam's Weesperstraat. 2023.

THE FLASH DELIVERY PLATFORM

In 2020, German flash delivery company Gorillas announced the opening of their first distribution centre in Amsterdam, serving De Pijp neighbourhood. And Gorillas wasn't alone. In quick succession, Flink, Zapp, and Getir joined the Dutch market.

Since then, flash delivery operations in Amsterdam have been constantly changing. Local authorities have tried their best to curb the impact of these platforms, introducing and updating regulations. These regulations have focused on the location of dark stores as they seriously affect neighbourhood environments. However, flash delivery companies continue to find new ways around the rules.

In 2022, when the local authorities ordered Getir to shut down its dark store in De Pijp, they unwittingly shifted its function. Customers could step into the store to purchase their products in person – *"te voldoen aan de juridische vereisten van de gemeente"* – to meet the legal requirements of the municipality.[1] This is just one way that flash delivery companies managed to keep their doors open.

1 Roelle, "Gemeente Amsterdam wil ook 'supermarkt' van Getir in De Pijp sluiten."

An example of a poster used in the campaign against Flash delivery services. Norillas. Date unknown.

There have been protests and petitions by residents of Amsterdam, fed up with the nuisance of dark stores and the high concentration of delivery drivers in their neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, the riders are forging alliances, unionising and rallying against poor working conditions and contracts offered to them by their employers.

The impact of these companies extends beyond neighbourhoods to other services too, such as takeaway and *slower* grocery delivery services. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, supermarkets in Amsterdam have been offering delivery services to customers for years. However, the pressure upon them to compete with the speed of flash delivery is evident. In January 2022, supermarket chain Jumbo struck a deal with Gorillas, to list products on their flash delivery app, stock Jumbo goods in the Gorillas warehouses, and deliver Jumbo products directly to customers. In April 2022, Albert Heijn started to test flash delivery services with both Deliveroo and Thuisbezorgd – two companies that were previously oriented towards takeaways.

In Amsterdam, the flash delivery industry continues to mutate and evolve, blurring the lines between different delivery options. Companies have come and gone, including Zapp who ceased all operations in the Netherlands by July 2022. Deliveroo quickly followed in November 2022. In December 2022, Getir acquired Gorillas, leaving Amsterdam with just two prominent flash delivery competitors.

These changes reflect the continuing downward trend in flash delivery's success. Consumer demand lost momentum since the end of COVID-19 and the easing of pandemic regulations. However, flash delivery companies remain tight-lipped about the quantifiable evidence of this trend. Amidst the chaos, one thing is certain – the flash delivery landscape in Amsterdam hangs in the balance.

In some ways, the history of grocery delivery in Amsterdam shows us that flash delivery is simply a different, technologically enhanced iteration of what we have seen before. This begs the question, what is it about flash delivery that makes it innovative? Deliveries continue to be transported to customers' homes as quickly as possible to guarantee the freshness of produce.[2] The innovation of self service has transitioned from the supermarket aisle to the smart-phone app. Once again, bicycles and their riders display advertisements for their companies. Arguably, Getir has even regressed by offering an app-based grocery platform *followed by* a brick-and-mortar storefront.

2   This has long been a priority for sustainable food initiatives, which rely on decentralised delivery services (and more recently e-commerce) to deliver local, seasonal produce direct from farmers to customers.

Nevertheless, the history of grocery delivery also reveals the unintended consequences that a design or technological innovation can have on the most mundane cultural phenomenon, as simple and routine as grocery shopping. This encourages us to remain attentive to the broader influence of flash delivery, which reaches beyond our grocery shopping habits – from the way that we interact with our neighbours, to the overall functioning of our cities. For this reason, we must continue to scrutinise it.

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TRAP

REFLECTIONS ON EASY CONSUMPTION IN A CITY OF TEMPORARINESS

WORDS BY LETIZIA CHIAPPINI

It's a typical rainy day in Amsterdam and I'm all set to go to yoga class. But then, I feel cramps. A sure sign my period is starting. The thought of going to the supermarket seems like a monumental effort to get just a few tampons and some chocolate for my evening remedy. And what a coincidence! I open up the Flink app, and there it is – an image of a grocery delivery biker handing a bag of goodies to a woman comfortably sitting on her couch.

Flink advertisement. Flink. Undated.

"The city's large community of newcomers [...] presents an attractive market for these platforms. While they are unfamiliar with the city, flash delivery platforms offer a convenient spatial-technological fix "

Such an alluring advertisement, because this is exactly what I need. As the rain pours outside, the shelves of the phantasmagorical dark store are full of gaudy pink goods, sanitary products, chocolate bars, and a smiling rider unaffected by the downpour, maintaining the promise of delivery in only 10 minutes. I wonder if, just as local bookstores are disappearing, are street markets and supermarkets becoming superfluous and time-consuming thanks to flash delivery platforms? It's faster to order online – a false promise made by these flash delivery platforms, assuring us that the more we shop online, the more time we have for ourselves. In reality, placing an order on Flink, Gorillas, or Getir takes about 15 minutes. And let's not forget the delivery time which can easily take a good half an hour or more, especially during peak hours.

Despite my own recognition of this false promise, delivery platforms in Amsterdam have been thriving.

Why has Amsterdam become such a key market for these platforms? The answer lies in the many decades of neoliberal policies that created a fertile terrain for the increasing individualisation of Amsterdam's social fabric. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Netherlands witnessed a counter-culture phase, led by the 'Provo' and *kraakbeweging* squatters movement, who advocated to end social and housing inequalities across the country. Their housing revolution and its ideals of the "just city" lost momentum by the end of the 1980s. Their decline led to a shift in urban politics with the rise of neoliberal ideologies which encouraged individuals to pursue their own interests and goals, rather than working together for the common good. This neoliberal doctrine, with its culture of competition and individualism, has had a harmful impact on the principles of social cohesion and community well-being, resulting in an increasingly unequal and socially isolated Amsterdam.

The city has long been known for its high population turnover. In 2019 alone, 30,000 foreigners settled in Amsterdam, with the largest influx coming from India, followed by the United States, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Germany. The majority of these new residents, mainly students and young workers in their 20s and 30s, are a perfect target group for commercial platforms. In the aftermath of COVID-19, as inflation grew, both housing prices and the cost of living in Amsterdam significantly increased. For some, finding temporary accommodation, through Airbnb for example, is easier than securing a long-term rental.

Amsterdam's demographic characteristics create ideal conditions for flash delivery platforms to flourish. The city's large community of newcomers – with their temporary disposition – presents an attractive market for these platforms. While they are unfamiliar with the city and often don't have enough time to explore it, flash delivery platforms offer a convenient spatial-technological fix. The generational factor is also important in both consumption habits and the struggles posed by the high cost of living. Despite the popular belief that the younger generation is lazy with identical consumer tastes, they *also* make the perfect social composition of users that embed flash delivery platforms into the urban market.

It's important to recognise that these platforms don't offer a cure to Amsterdam's rising living costs. Rather, they offer a fake promise of efficiency by delivering a commodity. An illusion that particularly affects younger generations who struggle to study or work in one of Europe's most expensive cities, while they face poor mental health and eroding welfare-support structures. As a result, these flash delivery platforms thrive in a city where a sense of belonging is no longer tied to physical places but rather to the conveniences and promises offered by these commercial entities.

"flash delivery platforms thrive in a city where a sense of belonging is no longer tied to physical places but rather to the conveniences and promises offered by these commercial entities. " → 50

Significantly, the cultural component of food rituals in cities further contributes to the understanding that platforms thrive in some places like Amsterdam but not in others. According to a statement by Gorillas[1],

1   Gorillas, "Update on Gorillas Italian Presence."

"we have decided to sharpen our focus on Germany, France, the UK, the Netherlands, and the US (New York City). The vast majority of our revenues (90%) come from these key markets". Italy, and in particular Milan, doesn't demonstrate a "successful outcome [...] we have made the decision to begin a process that will finally result in the shutdown of our business operations in Milan, Rome, and Bergamo". What this announcement reveals is that food culture, affordable prices, and the social ritual of sharing a meal with friends or enjoying food at a local bar, are still important in Italy. Although Milan is an international and global city, its social conditions and diverse food purchasing habits may have influenced flash delivery's failure in the region.

As exemplified in Milan, there's a tendency to continue using certain products or practices based on historical preferences and a resistance to embrace change in our daily lives. That being said, flash delivery platforms put our existing social practices and interactions with the city's amenities at risk. They affect the way in which we experience and use the space around us, raising concerns about the overall fabric of the society.

Ultimately, I draw inspiration from the manifesto of Slutty Urbanism[2]. Amsterdam is a city working perfectly as a 'smoke-screen', obscuring, confusing,

2   Slutty Urbanism, "Manifesto."

and misleading the idea of an equal and inclusive urbanism. Instead, Amsterdam has become a dreadful landscape for exclusion, with the commodification of social life, and the enclosure of urban spaces, fueled by the laissez-faire attitude of the urban government, and the voracity of flash delivery platforms. *Urban platforms. Networks. Politics.* These terms are no longer

separate entities, but are interrelated, interconnected, and intertwined forces that fold and slice through one another. We need to challenge those in power; promote ethical production and consumption; and promiscuously speculate about emancipatory alternatives. After all, our digital urbanism is still under construction.

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SPECULATIVE

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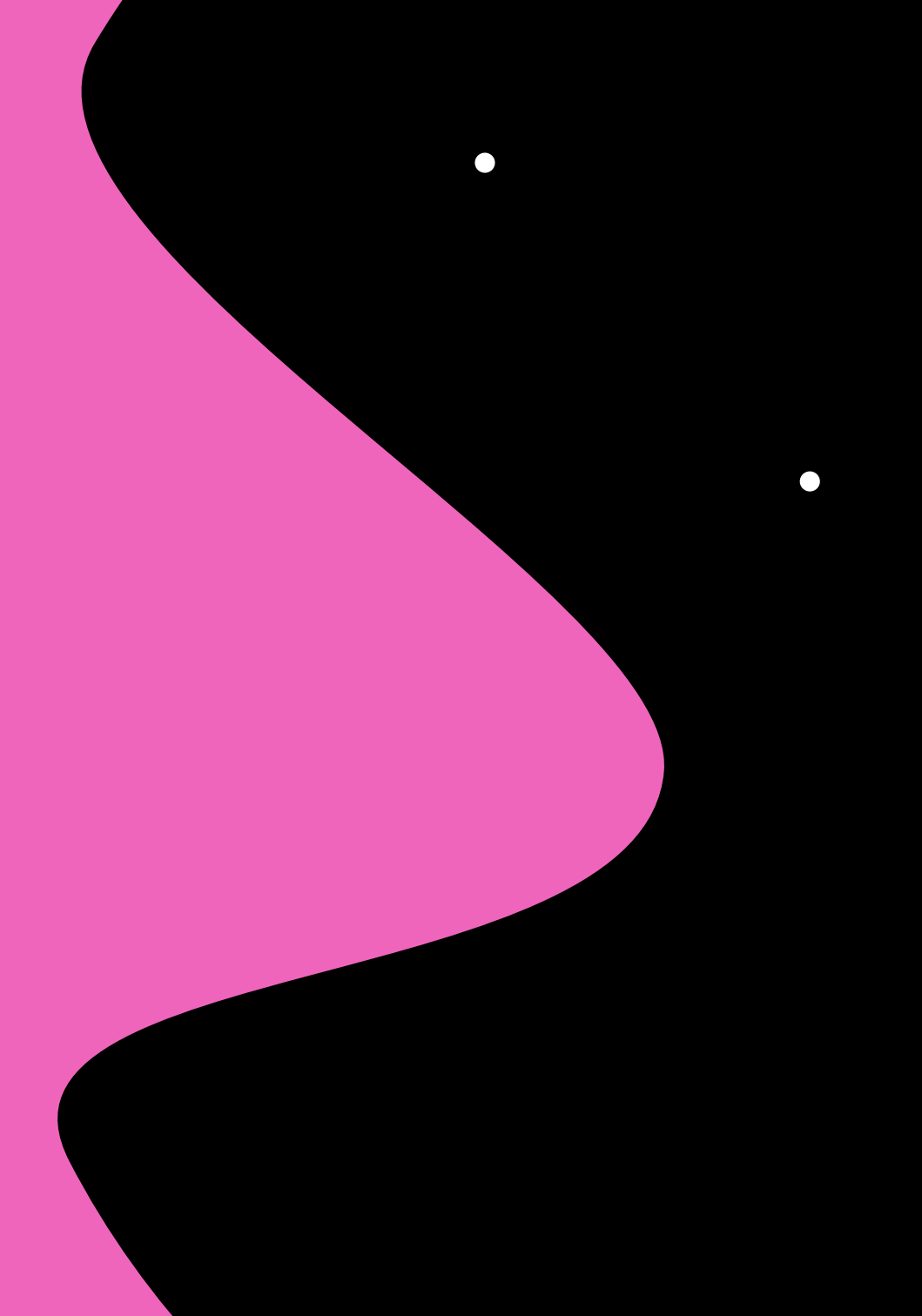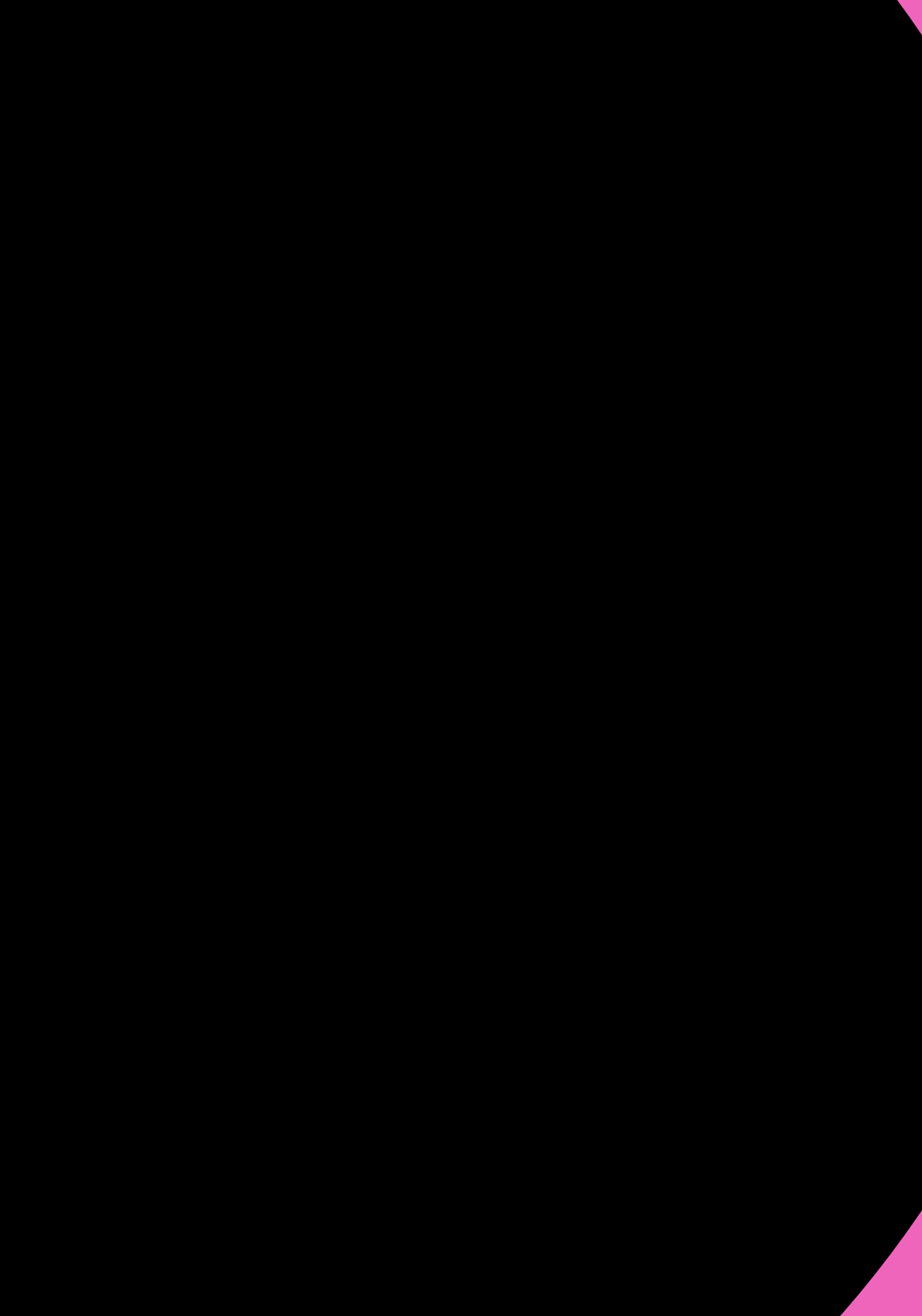
DELIVERY SERVICES

IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF FLASH DELIVERY IN AMSTERDAM

Bring together a group of innovative experts, pose a series of outlandish questions, sprinkle some provocative prompts into the mix and watch the ideas flow. This was the recipe for our world-building workshop that came alive in the heart of Amsterdam West in September 2022. Our mission was to dream, speculate, and imagine stories together about the future of the world of flash delivery.

Speculative world-building is a powerful tool for re-thinking and re-imagining our current global society. It's a playful journey that helps us make sense of the here and now while collaboratively prototyping radical ideas of what the future could hold. affect lab's role in this process is to gently guide the group as they navigate through a collective imagination and craft their ideas.

Thijs and Nyasha deep in speculative thought. Photo by Jannie Guo.

At the centre of our speculative world-building process lies the Miraculous Futures card deck.[1] Inspired by the mystic art of tarot, this is a collection of custom-designed, multicoloured A6 cards that help spark ideas. The card deck invites a moment to play, draw, debate, and co-create new worlds beyond the limits and boundaries of our existence. The worlds that emerge may appear naïve, strange, and radically weird, but the process of imagination behind them inspires a shift in thinking and ignites different trains of thought. With coloured pens, big sheets of paper, and even some artificial scents – yes, including the smell of the internet! – to invoke the sensory imagination, the speculative world-building is under way.

1 Designed in collaboration with Ashley Baccus-Clark and Ludi Leiva.

STEP 2. Speculative storytelling

Speculative storytelling is a way to get a fresh look at the present and future and provides tools for radical ideas. Use this template to think about daily life in your imagined city.

Are there class distinctions in this city? What do they look like?

class system based on rating

Describe a frustration or conflict. What do people protest about?

Not good enough service – high expectations

those who are dependent on or independent from flash delivery services?

Points/rating system

monopoly

people protest about the invasion of their privacy

What do people use to make sense of their world? (religion, magic, science, myths, etc.). Describe a daily returning event or ritual.

Black Friday Dine dwaze dagen

Back to the old times

embarrassing wrong delivery

health points

How do people move or travel?

Shared transport – monitored movement

'glitches' + cyber hacking

underground "analogue" rebellious movement! OFF GRID REBELS

recommended / ordered travel

Describe something funny that happened in the city.

hidden in the cornfields

Tell us a secret about your city!

One of the worksheet templates, based on the Miraculous Futures workshop produced by Ashley Baccus-Clark and Klasien van de Zandschulp of affect lab.

The experts were divided into two groups and each group received a question:

1. WHAT IF ALL FOOD SHOPS DISAPPEARED FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD?

2. WHAT IF FLASH DELIVERY COMPANIES HAD THE POWER TO RE-DESIGN THE CITY?

As creative energy filled the room, sketches came to life and worlds began to emerge. What will this future world smell like? How would it feel to be part of it? What will we see in this world? What sounds will fill the air? And, above all, who will benefit from this world?

affect lab crafted the following stories as they emerged from these collective imaginations. Yes, they may seem extreme – an idealistic utopia where neighbours grow and cook food together in harmony, versus a dystopian tech city dominated by a fleet of flying delivery vehicles. Yet, beneath their hyperbolic narratives, these stories signal something else – our desire for what's beyond the ordinary. They also open our eyes to the ways flash delivery could work to serve communities, or, if left unfettered, totally reshape our cities.

THE HARVEST CITY

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE
OF A COMMUNITY CULTIVATOR

Once upon a time, our little neighbourhood was ruled by flash delivery companies, whizzing around on their lightning fast e-bikes. Finally, fate found its way and the companies were forced to leave. The dark store was left behind at the far end of the street, with its unused shelves, refrigerators, and deep freezers – eerily empty, untouched, and abandoned for what felt like an eternity. The municipality was clueless and thought about what to do with this place now, but the community had a brilliant idea – why not turn it into a communal food space for everyone to share?

Now, the former dark store is fundamental to our community. We filled the shelves with dry goods and stocked the fridges with fresh produce. Our buzzing kitchen cooks up shared meals twice a week bringing the whole community together. In this world, food is no longer a commodity. People take what they need and contribute how they can. We've stopped hoarding food for ourselves, and instead embraced sharing with our neighbours, building trust and deepening our connections.

In this community, we have a remarkable team of food couriers who used to work for the flash delivery companies. With unique knowledge of Amsterdam's sprawling road networks, they harness their insider knowledge of the city to collect food from local allotments, bring it to the communal kitchen, and share it with everyone. Everything else is supplied directly by farmers outside of the city.

The Harvest City. Illustration by Koooooos.

Although we're relieved by our liberation from the corporations who once controlled our food supplies, isn't it a shame that they leave behind large infrastructures that go to waste? Now, the same infrastructure forms the foundations of a sharing economy. It is no longer reserved for the privileged few – anyone can benefit from the platform. The community now uses the flash delivery app to buy, sell, and trade products. The influential investors who once dictated the course of flash delivery now find themselves as part of the community. The barriers of commercial hierarchy that once separated us are now dissolving. We're basically working with the ruins of capitalism. Who would've thought that something so vibrant could emerge from the remnants of a crumbling structure? We find ourselves in a self-sustaining system that prevents corporate giants like Gorillas and Jumbo from dominating cities. Instead, it's the local butcher, the skilled shoemaker, and the traditional greengrocer who thrive through the flash delivery platform.

Within our cooperative neighbourhood, a sense of sha-red responsibility encourages everyone to contribute to the food commons. That is, everyone except for the few outsiders, who are still clinging on to their old flash delivery habits. We all know who they are as we regularly catch glimpses of the flash delivery riders racing to their doorsteps with large bags of food in their hands. The act of growing, distributing, cooking, and eating food together bonds the community. Those who choose to stay isolated miss out on the communal fervour, and end up shopping, cooking, and eating in solitude. They're still our neighbours, and always welcome to join us for communal meals. But there are moments it feels as if we're living in an alternate reality, so different from theirs.

Once plagued by the hum of e-scooters on tarmac, lit up by glaringly bright blue and pink adverts of Albert Heijn and Flink, the atmosphere in our streets has completely transformed. It's quieter – quiet enough

that you can hear the birds sing. Birds, bats, and bees have returned to our neighbourhood, drawn by the flourishing plant life in our allotments. The scent of the air is different too. The rich and earthy smell of compost travels beyond our neighbourhood reaching into nearby communities, spreading the transformative power of our new system and inspiring new cooperatives to share our mission.

And the best part? Our community has blossomed into an edible paradise, with nature at every turn. Nuts and berries grow in every corner, and even the walls of buildings burst with harvests. In the grey winter, the neighbourhood harvest is smaller, but we ferment and store the summer's abundance to keep ourselves warm on rainy days, and the bright colours of the kimchi remind us of our fruitful summer harvest. The streets no longer shed a gloomy shade of asphalt upon our lives, as they have been transformed to a grandiose green. Every material finds a purpose through re-use, seamlessly blending the hardscapes and the softscapes in a way that enriches the acoustics of our city. Who could've imagined how transformative a wall of moss could be?

Our eating rituals have changed too. Away with sad office lunches and salty midnight munchies! We eat from the land that's always been there to sustain us. We take what we need, and give back what it needs. No longer constrained by artificial mealtimes, we eat when the fruit that grows alongside us whispers that it's ripe and ready for us. If someone has an abundance of apples, they can put them in the community fridge for a neighbour, and take from the overflowing container of freshly harvested broccoli from yesterday. Are there any scheduled meals? Of course, there are, but not bound by any rigidness. The best ones are when we prepare, cook, and gather together to eat in the community kitchen. It's our favourite time of the week – a moment to share our stories, nourish our body and soul, and celebrate our community.
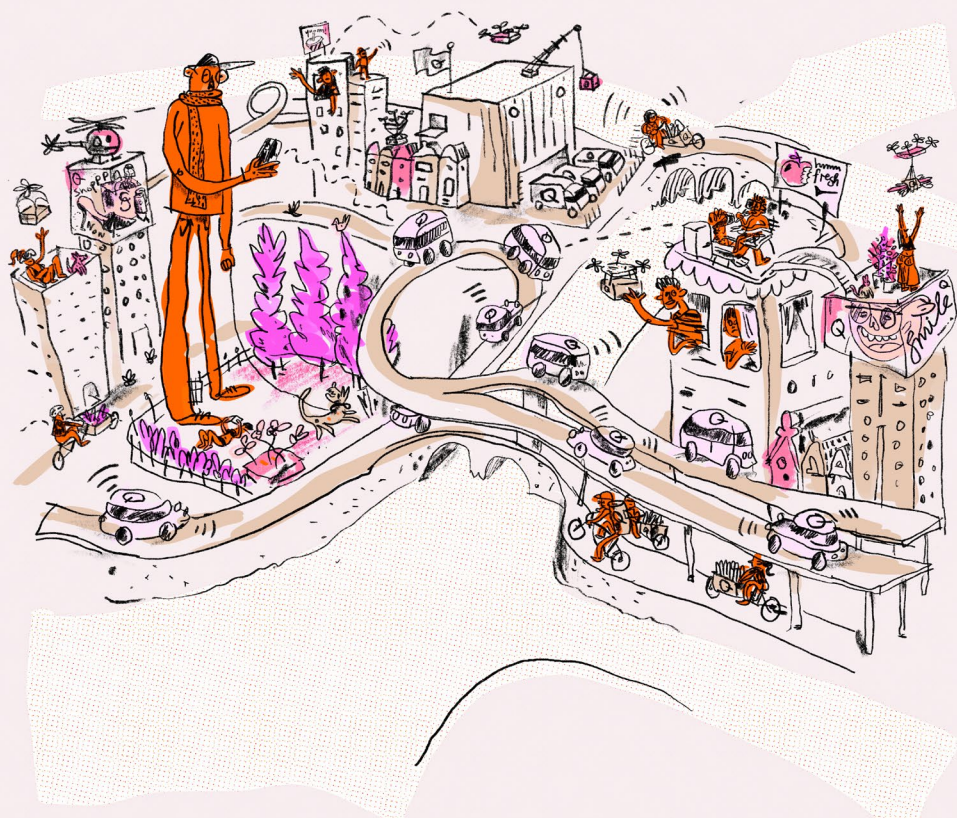
THE ACCELERATED CITY

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE
OF A FLASH DELIVERY CEO

With my virtual reality headset securely in place, I prepare myself for the work day ahead. I'm struck by the realisation of my dual roles as CEO of a flash delivery company and Head Urban Planning Officer for the municipality. The cityspace has transformed into a futuristic landscape, intricately woven into an interconnected web of logistics. Now, the city operates as a single logistics system. Efficiency reigns supreme, with roads, tunnels, and airspace all meticulously designed to grant our distribution vehicles uninterrupted priority. Leisure and other activities won't slow us down or stop the continuous progress of our flash delivery fleet throughout the city.

Amsterdam has never been denser! We've made sure that you're always just a stone's throw away from one of our delivery centres. The days of a sprawling city are over. A sprawling city makes deliveries more complicated and time consuming. Plus, we've infused pockets of greenery all over the city, so there's always a slice of nature in your backyard. No one has to travel to access nature anymore, which only adds to the congestion on our roads.

Why bother with the hassle of private transportation when we can effortlessly bring the world to you? Our app has it all covered. Besides, it's healthier to walk through traffic-free streets. You'll never frantically rush to the shops to buy something urgently. Instead, what you need simply appears at your doorstep. All you have to do is lean out of your window and detach your parcel from the soft clasp of our delivery drones.

We are no longer just a flash delivery app. We are so much more than that. Our app is your social network. It

is your valuable source of information. It is your go-to stop for buying, renting, and repairing things. Your whole life is in this digital app. It's a new and better system for everyone. We know exactly what you want, sometimes even before you do.

Back when flash delivery only delivered food and basic household essentials, it was so limited. Now, we can deliver anything you need. Need a vacuum cleaner? Rent it from us. Need a sofa and a flatscreen for movie night? Rent it from us. Why burden yourself by owning an excess of objects when you can rent them in under 10 minutes? Isn't a sharing economy better for all? We think so, especially as our business model thrives on the transportation of goods. When you rent rather than buy, it unlocks an endless cycle of repeated deliveries and collections at your home.

Do you remember what the city sounded like back in 2023? Utter chaos! A noisy blend of speeding scooters, blaring sirens, and honking cars. Now, the city has a unique hum to it. The sound of efficiency – like music to our ears. There's the gentle buzz of drones flying over quiet self-driving cars on freshly paved streets. No more horns or traffic jams, because no one has to travel anymore. There's no need. Everything can be delivered.

The city is lit up by the glow of advertisements. The facades of buildings serve as canvases, displaying glossy images of our product range, tailored especially for you, our loyal customer. Each display varies from person to person, but also harmonises depending on the changing seasons within a mass of algorithmic data. And just in case the billboard spectacle doesn't nudge you enough, the smell of fresh apple pie and roasted chicken will also waft through the air.

Oh, and have you seen our latest billboard campaign? The friendly faces of models dressed as delivery riders

are taking the city by storm! Sure, most of our orders are handled by delivery robots, but who cares? We're all about that human touch. Showing humans as the face of our company is a type of realness we can sell. Despite our efforts, we hear rumours that citizens are disgruntled. Their whispers of discontent reveal a craving for human interaction, harking back to a time when people used to purchase bread from local bakeries, and meat from trusted butchers. It's a little nostalgic if you ask me... But, for those dear citizens who desire more authenticity, we're tirelessly working on a special service tailored just for you. For a modest fee, you can have a real human deliver goods to your door, just like the good old days! "Made by a human, delivered by a human"– a premium novelty for our loyal customers.

THE PLATFORM

NEXT

↳ DOOR

THE EXTREME CASE STUDY OF THE FAGELSTRAAT

WORDS BY MINNIE BATES

In June 2021, the British flash delivery company Zapp opened a dark store at Fagelstraat 71-H in the Frederik Hendrikbuurt, a neighbourhood in Amsterdam West. After a long campaign led by local residents, a Dutch court ruled that Zapp's Fagelstraat dark store must shut its doors by April 2022 – less than a year after it first opened.

To understand why this was so interesting to our research, it's helpful to give a sense of this location. Fagelstraat is nestled in a quiet residential neighbourhood with leafy trees, flower-filled pavement gardens, and the gentle rhythm of bicycles passing through. It's situated close to a picturesque park and a peaceful canal. By local accounts – and house prices – it's a sought-after place to live.

After a period of thorough desk research, we were ready to start interviewing Amsterdammers about their personal encounters with flash delivery in the city. What immediately struck us about the case study of the Fagelstraat was the tide of emotion that coursed through its narrative. At the heart of this story, we encountered fury, anger, resentment, and regret – all part of the affective register of the events that took place. Some residents were overtly eager to share their experiences, while others appeared too traumatised to even recount some of the details of what happened.

What our research shows is the way that flash delivery disrupts the city on a micro level. From the perspective of local residents, a dark store emerges as a source of unwelcome intrusion – through spatial reconfiguration, nuisance, and an overwhelming interruption to their daily rhythms. At the same time, these street-level disruptions represent just a fragment of the larger flash delivery operational composition. Beneath the surface, we found a complex interplay – that the promise of delivery in less than 10 minutes *not only* shapes the way a dark store operates on a residential street like the Fagelstraat; it also has a transformative influence on broader business strategies, labour conditions, and the policies of local government.

1   At their request, we have protected the anonymity of the residents of the Fagelstraat and the dark store location manager.

In the upcoming pages, we will explore the events that unfolded in this neighbourhood, as told to us by a location manager for Zapp's Fagelstraat dark store, two local residents, and Elisabeth IJmker, a Groenlinks council member.[1] We enriched this qualitative research with our ongoing desk research to construct a picture of the conflict that took place in this community. Our aim was to understand the different perspectives and narratives at play in this highly charged situation.

NUISANCE

For flash delivery companies, their defining quality is the speed of their deliveries. But for the neighbours of the Fagelstraat, this defining quality became a major nuisance.

"There was an unbelievable number of problems. Unbelievable nuisance, unbelievable noise,

unbelievable damage, unbelievable insecurity. Nuisance at all levels"

— FAGELSTRAAT RESIDENT I

The stories told by Fagelstraat residents about the months when Zapp operated out of their street are filled with vivid descriptions of sound. The voices of riders chatting on the pavement or in doorways during their breaks. The resounding thud of fridge doors slamming in the dark store. The ceaseless ringing of alarms signalling incoming orders. The rackety arrival of delivery lorries in the early mornings at 5am multiple days a week to deliver new stock to the dark store. For some residents, particularly those who lived above or directly opposite the dark store, the noise became unbearable, and compelled them to make the difficult decision to leave the Fagelstraat and move elsewhere.

The dark store location manager also expressed his concern about the nuisance caused by the riders.

"We were taking these measures [to ensure] nobody is hanging around outside, especially at night [...] but now it's so difficult to control riders who are coming back or when they're leaving."

— DARK STORE LOCATION MANAGER

For him, limiting the noise made by riders at night would have perhaps been the most important solution for resolving the conflict between Zapp and the

Photography by Mark Manzi. Illustration by Koooooos.

The sounds of the dark store: buzzing, ringing, clatter, and chatter.
As riders depart on their delivery journeys and catch up with each other
on their breaks, irritated residents watch on from their homes.

residents. The manager recounted his attempts to keep the noise at a low level, especially at night. As the only flash delivery company offering a 24-hour service, nighttime was a significant period for Zapp's business. His proposed resolutions centred on reducing noise disturbances and ensuring the riders cleared up any mess they made on the street.

Nuisance also stands as the central concern for both the local city administration and councillors in their campaign to regulate flash delivery operations in Amsterdam. Elisabeth IJmker recalled how the debate around flash delivery services shifted in the summer of 2021, with a growing number of complaints by residents about the disruptive impact of flash delivery's operations.

> "...it's about the overlast [nuisance]. But there's so much more at stake here [...] the fundamental business model, the type of economy that we want, that sort of gets lost."
> — ELISABETH IJMKER, GROENLINKS

The local authorities dictate which areas of the city dark stores can operate within. Their zoning plans guide this process, largely emphasising the management of public space and prevention of nuisance. While this *is* important, it diverts attention away from the other critical dimensions of flash delivery that warrant scrutiny – such as traffic safety, labour conditions, and, on a more macro scale, societal value.

SPATIAL TENSION

The issue of nuisance is closely connected to the architecture of the city. The promise of delivery within 10 minutes means that flash delivery services and their dark stores must operate in close proximity to customers. Amsterdam's architectural landscape, characterised by the prominence of the canal house typology, poses difficulties for operating dark stores. Fagelstraat 71-H is situated on the ground floor, right in the middle of the street, standing as one of only four units on the street with a non-residential function.

"Our warehouse used to be empty every night because we were selling so much. So, we need replenishment every single day."

— DARK STORE LOCATION MANAGER

Similar problems occur at multiple dark store locations across Amsterdam, mainly because of the unavoidable tension between the streetscape and the need for proximity. These dark stores complete their logistics at all hours of the day or night. They usually operate out of really small spaces and thus need constant restocking – differentiating them from a typical supermarket.

It's clear from the residents' perspective that the disturbance is primarily linked to the dark store's proximity to their homes. However, the problem with the location goes further than this and is inherently intertwined with the type of space that Zapp occupied

Photography by Mark Manzi. Illustration by Koooooos.

*The unsuitable street – the narrow Fagelstraat, a one-way residential street,
continuously blocked by delivery vehicles there to restock
and replenish the ever-demanding dark store.*

on the Fagelstraat.Originally used as a garage, 71-H is the ground floor of a residential building. The same space on either side has a residential function. This architectural structure is unmistakably unsuitable for a distribution centre.

> "Nobody thought about it. Normally you have a delivery door [...] where everything goes straight to your storage area."
>
> — DARK STORE LOCATION MANAGER

Not only is it on a residential street, but it's a compact unit with constrained storage space, in need of perpetual stock replenishment, and lacking the design features essential for accommodating such logistics, such as a rear entrance for deliveries. The compact layout of the dark store did not offer a relaxing environment for a rider or picker to take a break. The dark store manager encouraged the staff to take their breaks in the park at the end of the street. However, with limited time, many riders ignored this request. Instead, they opted to spend their breaks standing outside the dark store. Many of them were smokers, and on rainy days they would smoke in the porticoes of the residents' homes. One resident reported being woken up in the middle of the night by the sound – and smell – of two riders smoking and chatting on her doorstep.

OWNERSHIP

"The arrival of such a company disrupts the entire structure of a socially developed neighbourhood. [...] it was a pleasant neighbourhood in that respect [...] until Zapp came along."
— FAGELSTRAAT RESIDENT I

The arrival of the Zapp dark store in the Fagelstraat presented a serious, tangible change for residents. For them, the dark store altered the existing ecosystem of a quiet street, inhabited by those who are familiar with and considerate of each other. A place where people let their children play in the street, sit with their dogs in front of doorsteps, and tend to their front gardens. The arrival of Zapp also meant the arrival of a new group of people – Zapp's employees – who had a noticeably different relationship to the Fagelstraat than its residents.

"You would still have them hanging around, the trash on the streets, guys who don't respect the neighbourhood, who don't feel any attachment at all. [...] they don't care."
— FAGELSTRAAT RESIDENT II

In our interviews, the residents expressed a strong sense of ownership and attachment to the Fagelstraat, evident through their diligent care of the neighbourhood and the closely-knit community they have built over time. However, their conversations equally emphasised a recognised lack of ownership or concern by the Zapp staff.

> "If you are becoming a part of the neighbourhood, then you need to give back to the neighbourhood too. Because you are profiting off being in this neighbourhood..."
>
> — DARK STORE LOCATION MANAGER

The dark store's location manager acknowledged this apparent issue of neglect. He saw the need for Zapp to invest more into the neighbourhood and local community. Importantly, he also observed the correlation between the type of employment offered by Zapp and the disconnected attitude this created amongst the staff.

> "I did pass on this message to my headquarters too, but there was no reaction."
>
> — DARK STORE LOCATION MANAGER

With its rapid business growth, Zapp hired agency workers to support the efforts of its more permanent staff in the dark stores. But these agency workers showed

no vested interest in Zapp, let alone in the Fagelstraat where, unbeknownst to them, a conflict between dark store workers and residents was brewing. With different agency workers turning up each week to work for Zapp, the dark store manager found it difficult to form a relationship with them and gain their respect. While the dark store manager was trying to establish rules to limit nuisance, the new agency staff were unaware of these rules, let alone why they were so important.

ACCOUNTABILITY

During the early stages of Zapp's operations in the Fagelstraat, residents took the initiative to meet with the dark store's location manager to address some of the emerging issues. They gathered at a picnic bench at the end of the street, a spot frequently used by residents for socialising and sharing drinks, with the intention to seek a resolution. Contrary to their expectations the residents claim that the dark store manager was reluctant to consider the community's concerns.

2   Zapp does not receive financial backing from Amazon. It does receive financial backing from Christopher North (former Amazon UK CEO) amongst other investors.

"One of the first things he said was 'I don't know what you guys are thinking, but we are here to stay. There's a very big company behind this' – which is Amazon[2] – 'And, we have very big investors, so, [...] we are here to stay'. So, that actually already set the tone a little bit." — FAGELSTRAAT RESIDENT II
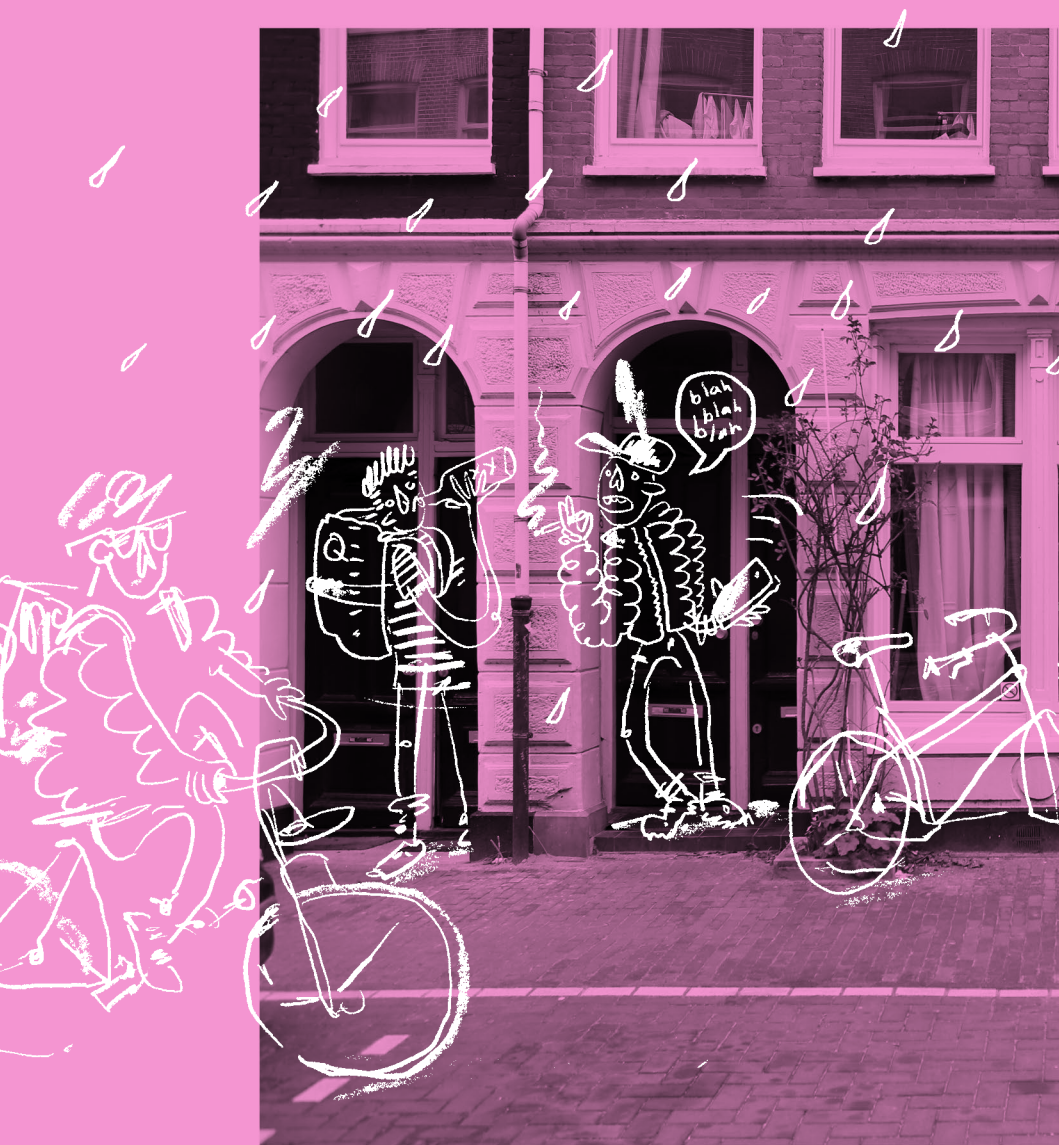
Photography by Mark Manzi. Illustration by Koooooos.

Riders shelter from the rain, smoking, and chatting in the portico of a residents' home – a private space which they appropriate for their own use.

This is not the same location manager we interviewed – a series of managers came and went during the brief period of Zapp's activities in the Fagelstraat. The location manager we interviewed expressed his dismay at Zapp's approach to deflect the residents' complaints to a remote team. Taking matters into his own hands, he intervened to manage the grievances himself and bridge the accountability gap.

"Zapp told us that they [the residents] should call customer service if they have problems. I said 'what rubbish is this?' A neighbour having a problem will call Zapp customer service that is located somewhere else, and then they will contact us [...] if I could control something, I will do that at any point of time. And if I cannot, I will ask my supervisor or somebody in the store."

— DARK STORE LOCATION MANAGER

The resident quoted earlier, on the other hand, asserts that the dark store activities were unsuitable for the neighbourhood, indicating a disconnection between the store and the community's expectations. She perceived a misalignment between the residents' values and sense of community and Zapp's operations. During our visits to the Fagelstraat, we saw several orders being delivered by other flash delivery companies. This raised a few

questions for the research team: Is there a lack of unanimity among Fagelstraat residents in their opposition to flash delivery? Or, could it be that their objection is merely to do with the proximity of a dark store, rather than the service it provides?

"There was no HR department, there were no employee guidelines, there were no rules. [...] There were a lot of new faces, so there was obviously some turnover. But, yeah, I think Zapp also really didn't care that much, as long as they could earn the money." — FAGELSTRAAT RESIDENT II

It is not totally clear whether/how this resident knew there was no HR department, employee guidelines, or rules. However, from her viewpoint, it clearly felt like there was no authority or established systems in place to give her the confidence that the problems concerning the staff's behaviour would be resolved. It conveys a sense of powerlessness felt by the residents – the result of an ignored accountability on the part of Zapp.

Overall, the accounts of the residents, juxtaposed with accounts of the location manager, vividly point to a notable disparity in accountability between Zapp and the local community. While the residents sought resolution and accountability, they encountered dismissive attitudes and a lack of established communication channels for addressing their concerns.

These dynamics fostered feelings of powerlessness and frustration for both the residents and the location manager.

The issue of accountability raises further questions about the ethical responsibilities that digitally mediated and cloud-based companies like Zapp should have towards the community that lives next door. Through the lens of the Fagelstraat case study, we can see just how a platform designed to make grocery shopping quicker and easier for the consumer can become a source of friction and discord within the neighbourhood it shares physical boundaries with.

The debate around whether the Fagelstraat was an appropriate location for a dark store was brought to an end with the local authority's decision to close it down in April 2022. Despite the closure, the significance of this conflict continues to resonate, and the regulation of dark stores in Amsterdam remains a work in progress.

While this qualitative investigation has *primarily* focused on the problems and challenges that dark stores pose in a neighbourhood, the influence of flash delivery platforms transcends mere nuisance in residential areas. While zoning regulations may address immediate issues, the deeper question of how we understand the societal value of these platforms emerges as the bigger question in need of urgent consideration.

The extreme case of the Fagelstraat illuminates a complex interplay between convenience-driven technological innovation and the lived realities of a local community. As cities continue to navigate the intricate relationship between innovation and community, there's a delicate equilibrium that must be struck to ensure that progress aligns with the shared values and aspirations of the communities it serves.

"The issue of accountability raises further questions about the ethical responsibilities that digitally mediated and cloud-based companies like Zapp should have towards the community that lives next door. "

Photography by Mark Manzi. Illustration by Koooooos.

A picnic bench at one street corner – the site of multiple confrontations between residents and Zapp employees. Once a place where residents met for an evening drink, the bench has since been removed.

THE RISE →

OF FLASH DELIVERY AND

THE BUMPY RIDE

TOWARDS THE SMOOTH CITY

NAVIGATING THE ISSUE OF CONVENIENCE FOR SOME AND DISCOMFORT FOR (MANY) OTHERS

WORDS BY RENÉ BOER

Nowadays it's common for office workers in Amsterdam's famous skyscraper, the recently renovated "A'DAM tower", to *order* their lunch from "The Butcher Social Club" on the tower's ground floor. Instead of hopping into the elevator 20 floors down, they sluggishly place an order through Uber Eats, leaving someone else to bike all the way to the tower, wait for the food, and then take the elevator 20 floors up to finally deliver it. Indulging in such a lazy routine would've been unthinkable in Amsterdam only a few years ago. In just a short time, however, things have changed as the city has become a living breeding ground for all kinds of flash delivery, providing everything from a few groceries to a quick lunch.

Having foodstuff delivered is nothing new, of course. Pizzerias have been biking their pizzas around for ages, and Amsterdam's notorious 'beer taxi' has been making its nocturnal rounds as long as people can remember, supplying to parties constantly in desperate need of refreshments. However, the recent growth and current omnipresence of flash delivery is of a different scale and ambition, closely intertwined with Amsterdam's wider transformation. Over the last two decades, Amsterdam has, like many other cities in the world, gradually become a 'Smooth City' – which is characterised by a growing obsession with 'perfection', efficiency, control, and the active eradication of anything that stands in its way. By now, almost

the entire city has been perfectly renovated and most instances of friction or contestation have (seemingly) been smoothed out.

The sudden proliferation of a wide range of flash delivery companies in Amsterdam, and the resulting normalisation of having your four-course meal, curated ingredient package or single grocery item delivered to your doorstep in no-time is clearly part of the current smoothification of Amsterdam. Flash delivery offers exactly the easy, efficient, and frictionless experience that many people in the smooth city nowadays expect from all kinds of urban processes. People no longer have to go outside, face weather conditions, experience the built environment, or interact with other humans. Instead, flash delivery companies offer apps that provide a full overview of the various products, their specifications, reviews, and delivery options from the comfort of one's sofa, with only a one-click checkout and a short waiting time standing between you and the product.

This normalisation of having everything you consume delivered to your home or office is also referred to as 'convenience culture'. It applies to all aspects of life in the city which have been optimised with various kinds of apps, from arranging cab rides to setting up romantic encounters. While we can't ignore people's need for comfort and convenience in an increasingly tough world, it can't be denied how convenience culture contributes to the smoothification of the city in a way that's not only beneficial, but also problematic. Convenience culture reduces the complexity of the city as it decreases the need for things like bustling street markets, street festivals, self-made local shops, busy taxi ranks, and outdoor cruising areas. By doing so, it contributes to the smooth city's impulse to flatten the city into a singular, smooth layer which eliminates depth as well as encounters across differences.

"Flash delivery offers exactly the easy, efficient, and frictionless experience that many people in the smooth city nowadays expect from all kinds of urban processes." → 100

By consolidating control over certain economic sectors in the hands of a few companies, it also exacerbates the smooth city's anti-democratic nature. Inhabitants of the smooth city tend to have less and less opportunities to collectively shape and organise their city themselves, and having an important sector such as food provision increasingly dominated by flash delivery further decreases these opportunities. At the same time, the normalisation of convenience culture further solidifies the increasingly dominant norms of the smooth city, such as comfort and efficiency, as well as shaping one's identity with brands and not wasting a second of the working day. The impersonal logistical machine behind convenience culture further amplifies the smooth city's negation of the human desire for the imperfect, the unpredictable, and the spontaneous.

However, the reproduction of smoothness can, counterintuitively, be a messy process and involve not-so-smooth conditions which are often made invisible or located as far away as possible. The lithium and other heavy metals required for the electric batteries of the smooth city are sourced under terrible circumstances in faraway mines. Cleaners in some London offices come into work on the first night bus and leave on the last, to ensure bankers don't witness the hidden clutter of their working environment. When new forms of smoothness are being produced, however, the un-smooth is often not yet perfectly hidden, as seen with many forms of convenience culture. In Amsterdam, the introduction of Uber Pop led to riots by regular cab drivers and repaving the entire city with expensive-looking materials caused disruption everywhere.

In a similar way, the sudden growth of flash delivery has led to various situations which don't fit the smooth city's 'perfect' image. Delivery bikers are accused of loitering and making noise outside the so-called 'dark

stores' where they pick-up groceries, of biking too fast and dangerously, and disrupting restaurant atmospheres as they wait inside in large numbers for the meal they came to pick up. At this early stage in the rise of flash delivery, the phenomenon is not only contributing to the proliferation of smoothness, it's also creating some disruption for which, apparently, there is very little tolerance. Across the city, complaints about these new dark stores and biker behaviour have led to various court cases. In response, the municipality has started to clamp down on the dark stores while they creatively try to dodge the regulations.

The current situation, characterised by the rapid expansion of flash delivery, complaints about nuisance, and the sudden introduction of regulatory measures, is probably just a temporary bump in the ride towards a Smooth City. Most of the parties involved have a strong interest in ensuring the smooth city will prevail as soon as possible. There will most likely be specific dark store locations, protocols for bikers, and designated outdoor waiting areas near restaurants and shops. This way, flash delivery will integrate neatly in the smooth city, and smoothness will be guaranteed for homeowners near dark stores, the users of flash delivery services, and those enjoying a fine meal in a restaurant. At the same time, this means the bikers will experience more control and lose one of the social components of their work and are more likely to have to wait in the rain around the corner.

The current developments around flash delivery clearly show how the smooth city produces comfort for some and discomfort for others. Delivery workers have to bike across town, waste their time waiting, and making the effort to locate the right office of the creative elite on the top floors of the A'DAM tower, all to ensure uninterrupted views for some. These experiences serve as a strong reminder that it's time

"The impersonal logistical machine behind convenience culture further amplifies the smooth city's negation of the human desire for the imperfect, the unpredictable, and the spontaneous..."

to reconsider the desire for smoothness and start imagining a city with a more balanced distribution of comfort and discomfort. This is not necessarily a city without convenience, delivery services or even flash delivery, but rather a city in which delivery workers, together with everyone else in the city, have more of a say in how their city is shaped and how their labour is paid and organised, to ensure they can access and enjoy the same conveniences as others.

RENÉ BOER (he/him) works as a critic, curator and organiser in and beyond the fields of architecture, art, design and heritage, with a focus on spatial justice. He is a driving force behind the Failed Architecture platform, the co-founder of Loom, and author of *Smooth City*, a publication about the obsession with perfection in cities worldwide.

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→→
→→FLASH
→ → →
→→FORWARD

A CREATIVE INTERVENTION AND DYSTOPIAN AUDIO WALK INTO AMSTERDAM'S FUTURE

How can we encourage the people of Amsterdam to think about their role in shaping the future of their neighbourhood? At affect lab, this is the challenge we set for ourselves as we embarked on designing a creative intervention. Inspired by the discoveries made from the early research phases of this project, we aimed to spark a collective imagination about our city.

1 See Chapter 4: Speculative Delivery Services.

From our formative speculative worldbuilding workshop[1], two starkly different future scenarios emerged, each highlighting the distinct role of flash delivery in Amsterdam. Intrigued by these imaginations, we narrowed down our focus to one dark store to develop an in-depth case study – Zapp's dark store in the Fagelstraat. The combination of future scenarios and the case study of the Fagelstraat helped us create a fictitious and dystopian narrative set in Amsterdam's Frederik Hendrikbuurt in the year 2040. The story centres on a single flash delivery company that wields unbridled power over the entire city.

Our ultimate goal was to transport participants to the captivating futuristic world of Frederik Hendrikbuurt. With the help of a thought-provoking storyline, we encouraged them to reflect on their present surroundings. And what better way to do this than through a meticulously crafted site-specific audio walk?

In the upcoming chapter, we warmly invite you to embark on an immersive journey, where you will travel to a dystopian Amsterdam of the future. As the audio walk script unfolds, the story is brought to life by the narration of a classic hero-villain duo, amidst a dance of inventive sound effects that will only transport you deeper into the story.

A CITY EATING ITSELF (IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

Join a fictional audio walk through the streets of Amsterdam West

A RESEARCH AND STORYTELLING PROJECT EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF FLASH DELIVERY SERVICES ON AMSTERDAM

a project by

affect lab

creative industries fund NL

AF amsterdams fonds voor de kunst

www.acityeatingitself.net

INTRODUCTION

Sound   **[Background sound to give the listener time to adjust to experience: Bird sounds, trees in the wind]**

Duration   **Plays before introduction starts. No overlap with speech**

AI GUIDE   Welcome to A City Eating Itself (in less than 10 minutes), a project by affect lab.

INTRO   We're about to transport you to the year 2040 - where super fast delivery services have overrun the city of Amsterdam. As part of this story you will encounter a radically changed neighbourhood. Neighbours and their everyday routines are controlled by regimes of on-demand efficiency and speed. But not everyone is on board… The resistance is alive and kicking…as you're about to find out. This audio walk is the culmination of 12-months of research and interviews. We spoke with residents of Amsterdam, dark store workers and policy makers. While the story is complete fiction, we drew inspiration from real events. These took place here in this neighbourhood, during an extreme stand off between residents and a Zapp dark store in 2021. Our invitation to you today is to experience the streets, space, sounds and story at your own pace. Thanks for coming.

AI GUIDE   We will stay here a bit longer. Wait here till I give you instructions to walk.

Sound: **[Time travel sound… before we 'land' in the future]**
               → Timetravel.wav

SCENE 1

Location   **[Frederik Hendrikplantsoen]**

ADA   Ah, hello rider 42! I'm Ada, Chomp's human deliv-
             ery manager for neighbourhood West16. Congratu-
             lations, you've passed the application round to
             become one of a handful of *human* delivery couri-
             ers for Chomp! This is a key position as you will
             provide our specialist *human* service.
             Is your ear piece on comfortably?

Sound   **[High tech, futuristic sound of the audio device powering up. This
             lets the listener know that the walk is about to begin...]
             → Earpiece.wav**

ADA   Good - this ear piece is how we'll send you deliv-
             ery directions…and track your progress
             This is your new working district: West16, pre-
             viously known as the Frederik Hendrikbuurt. I'll
             give you an introduction and get you up to speed,
             before your trial delivery begins.

                         [PAUSE]

Sound   **[Nature sounds move into more 'fake' nature sounds: birds chirping
             but more digital sound (algorithmic birds, trees moving in the wind]
             → Birds.wav**
Duration   **Plays in the pause, continues quietly whilst Ada speaks**

ADA   You're now in one of the designated green zones.
             We've designed this space to activate hyper zen.
             Take a moment to hear the sound of algorithmic
             birds - projected over the city audio system. And
             customised to your favourite birdsong, a special
             touch we added to perfect the total experience of
             what we trademarked as *'nature'*.

                         [PAUSE]

ADA   Before we go any further, let me introduce Chomp -

AD-VOICE   *"Chomp, here to meet your needs, in a heartbeat"*
               Read by someone else, with background advert music
Sound   **→ Chomp ad.mp3**

ADA   We are no longer just a flash delivery app. We are
               so much more than that.

Sound   **Chomp music plays whenever the CEO goes into this sort of
               'speech mode'**
               → Motivational music.mp3

ADA   Our app is your social network. Your mainline to
               information. Life, only smoother. We know exactly
               what you need (before you do). We deliver to your
               doorstep in the blink of an eye. Welcome to the
               green future of efficiency.

Sound   **[Stop with motivational music]**

ADA   When you are on a delivery, look out for traffic
               while crossing roads or tram tracks. We want to
               avoid any time consuming lawsuits and ask our rid-
               ers to stay safe and out of trouble!
               Ok, we need to go, no time to waste. Let's walk!

AI GUIDE   Leave the green zone. Walk along the Gerard
               Schaepstraat, this is the street with the grey
               building on the right corner. You can recognise
               the direction by following the Chomp stickers.

Sound   **→ Greenzone.mp3**
               [mobile phone ringing]
               → Phone ringtone.wav

ADA   Oh! The Data Mining Centre needs me, I'll need to
               answer this… Go ahead - I'll catch up with you!.
               [Fake nature sounds can fade out here]

SCENE 2

Location	Start of Gerald Schaepstraat
Sound	[interrupted by incoming pirate radio!!!]
	[Pieter's voice comes through kind of fuzzy over the radio]
	→ Radio glitch.wav

PIETER   *SJeeeezus...zeg,* finally I got through to you! It
            took me a while to hack into your ear piece.

PIETER   You're chatting to that toxic Capitalist *Trut* from
            Chomp!! You know *they are* to blame for the devas-
            tation of our neighbourhood. Oh, wait, I'm Pieter!
            I've lived in this neighbourhood for ages. I grew
            up here, way before the flash delivery services
            invaded Amsterdam. They arrived back in 2020.
            Fighting each other for our money. One of those
            fuckers survived the competition: Chomp. [Piet-
            er imitates the advert] "Chomp, here to screw
            with your head, in a heartbeat". Those tech-heads
            changed everything!

                        [PAUSE]

PIETER   Bet you're wondering what's really different now?
            Come, I'll show you.

AI GUIDE   At the end of the street turn right.

AI GUIDE   Turn right.

Location   **Corner of Fagelstraat**

PIETER   Ha, I managed to decrypt your live location! I see
            you're now entering my street, the Fagelstraat.
            Slow down for a bit and see if you can spot some-
            thing *different* about one of these buildings. On
            the right, the building with the white tiles and
            the large garage door - that building used to be

a dark store in 2021. You don't need to rush - not *everything* is about efficiency! Take a moment to stop and look through the window into this vacant space.

AI GUIDE   Pause in front of the building with the white tiles and large garage door and look inside. Wait here until you hear the next instruction.

Sound   **[sounds of the dark store, beeping, humming, rustling, this sound can continue for a bit as background sound of the next paragraph of Pieter]**
→ Darkstore noise.wav

PIETER   This empty dark store reminds me of when it all started… Shit zeg, I can still hear the beeping sounds of the dark store scrambling my brain… The flash riders ruled the streets. We lived in fear of being run down by a rider or bombarded with insults for just sharing our concerns. The beeping noises of the dark store kept us awake all night. Delivery vans and garbage trucks would come and go all hours. And riders would hang around on the streets waiting for their next order. It's a true story!

PIETER   We tried to communicate and cooperate with the riders. We even tried to reach out to the company's head office. No one cared!! To them, the neighbourhood was just another convenient place for a dark store. Just thinking about this makes me angry!

[PAUSE]

PIETER   Many of my neighbours are totally reliant on Chomp now. *Most* people were easily seduced by Chomp's slick advertising campaigns.
I'm ashamed to admit, but I ordered my first pack

of cigarettes from this old company called Zapp…
I was young and naive back then. This was long
before I joined Buurt-hackers - we're a community
inspired by the neighbours of the Fagelstraat, the
original crew who successfully fought to reclaim
their neighbourhood from the dark store.

[PAUSE]

PIETER   Oh, I see a rider passing by now! HEY! GA VAN DIE
              STOEP AF!

Sound   **[sound of rider speeding past, alarm/alert sound for new flash
              delivery order]**
              → Human bike rider.wav
              → Darkstore noise + alarm_1.wav

PIETER   I can't stand to talk about this place for too
              long or I'll get nightmares again. Let's move on!

AI GUIDE   Continue walking.

PIETER   I'm going to Checkpoint Charlie to join my crew
              from Buurt-hackers. We're planning our next pro-
              test. Catch you later!

Sound   **[sound of Pieter's pirate channel switching off]**
              → Switching off radio.wav

AI GUIDE   Turn left onto Lodewijk Tripstraat

Sound   **[Sound here of someone joining the channel]**
              → Join sound effect.wav

TESSA   Hey hello! I'm customer 163, I'm intercepting this
              line! Do you have my delivery? Oh shit, of course
              not, I can't afford the human delivery service….

Sound [sigh]

TESSA   Are you new to Chomp? Great! Chomp saves my day.
            It's hard to leave the house for shopping. Ooeeef,
            single mom with 3 kids…you know what I mean? So Oh
            wait! I see the drone with my delivery now! Gotta
            run, bye!

Sound [Sound of drone approaching]
           → drone.wav
           [Sound of a baby in the background]
           [Sound of someone leaving the channel]

SCENE 3

Location	**Walk along Jacob Catskade**

ADA   Hello again.

[PAUSE]

ADA   Let's take a seat on the bench by the water. If you
             are lucky, you might see one of our high tech distri-
             bution ships coming past.

AI GUIDE   Please stop and take a seat on a bench

[PAUSE]

Sound   **[some water sounds to give them time to sit. This continues in the
             background of the next part of Ada's narration]
             → canal water 2.wav**

ADA   Apologies for the interruption earlier. I had to
             attend an emergency meeting - apparently the human
             staff in South11 are protesting, something about poor
             working conditions…so dramatic! It was so bad that
             they called in all the human area managers to manage
             the crisis. I will never let that sort of thing hap-
             pen in West16. Anyway, where were we?
             I'll tell you a bit more about how Chomp

Sound   **[munch noise]**

ADA   …rose to success. It was great when the city shut
             down during the COVID-19 pandemic. Who'd have thought
             of a better opportunity to establish a brand. Chomp
             wasn't just a regular brand you know, we were vi-
             sionary. The pandemic made us realise that we wanted
             to contribute to a better world. A more sustain-
             able world, with less traffic from citizens and more
             electric vehicles for transport and delivery.

[PAUSE]

ADA   Haha it is so funny to think that the city council at
           first tried to hinder our success. They just couldn't
           see what these innovations would bring them. Typical
           old fashioned slow bureaucracy. Now, the future truly
           lies in the hands of companies. Our company. Eventu-
           ally we convinced the mayor that the city had to be
           re-designed. Streets, pavements, delivery drop off
           points… all redesigned. So that everyone could profit
           from the efficiency of flash delivery.

Sound   **[PIRATE RADIO STATION COMES ON]**
           → Radio glitch.wav

PIETER   Chomp knew exactly what they were doing!

           [Ada shouts but into the distance, away from the mic]
ADA   Hey! Stop that immediately!

PIETER   They nurtured our desires… creating a sense that
           there's a huge demand from us, Amsterdammers, to
           eat ice cream at midnight, or drink a cold beer
           at five in the morning! Pure indoctrination I'm
           telling you, it's all mind games!

           [we hear her speaking into a walkie-talkie]
ADA   How are they interfering with our earpieces?!

PIETER   Hahaaa your servers may be the state of the art
           Chomp…but there's nothing that we can't hack!
           [mocking tone]
PIETER   Hey Ada - are you *proud* of what Chomp has done to
           the city?!

ADA   Of course I'm proud. And why wouldn't I be? Flash
           delivery is what *everyone* wants. Data never lies. We
           answer the call from the people. We save time for
           everyone. Chomp is there for *everyone*, it is the

future for *everyone. Everyone, except you it seems!*

PIETER   Then why doesn't it feel like our city anymore?!
              Your slick narrative doesn't fool me, power to the
              Buurthackers!!

Sound   **[Pieter's audio crackles and fades out]**

ADA   Those damn Buurthackers have been hijacking our city
              audio networks all day!

                           [PAUSE]

Sound   **[We hear the CEO take a deep breath in and out to calm herself down]**
              [bring back the Chomp music]
              → Motivational music.mp3

ADA   Now look what we've achieved. The city operates as a
              single logistics system. Efficiency is prioritised,
              with roads, tunnels, airspace, all designed to give
              distribution vehicles priority. Even the canals act
              as designated flash delivery transit routes. You
              might even end up working at one of our floating
              distribution centres one day…

Sound   **[Fade out Chomp music]**

ADA   Oh I'm getting carried away. We need to move on,
              no time to lose. Chomp chomp! Haha, sorry, insider
              joke. On your feet and continue walking!

Sound   **[Fade out water sounds]**

AI GUIDE   Continue walking.

ADA   Now that you know a bit more about the company, it's
              time to start your trial delivery. That Chomp bag
              you're carrying? Keep listening to the navigation
              instructions because you need to know where it will

be delivered. And don't forget - efficiency is always your number one priority. So no small talk with the neighbours okay?!

Sound	**[beep beep beep, ping (like a countdown sound)]** **→ Countdown.wav** **→ Start trial_v4.mp3**

AI GUIDE   Your trial delivery begins NOW!

ADA   Do you hear that?

Sound	**[humming noises]**

ADA   …perfection. The sweet sound of efficiency

Sound	**[humming city sounds]** **→ drone.wav** **→ Fast car.wav** **→ E bike 1.m4a ADA**

ADA   Back when flash delivery only delivered food and basic household products it was so limited. *[ad music?]* *Now, we can deliver anything you need. Need a vacuum cleaner? Rent it from us. Need a sofa and a flatscreen for movie night? Rent it from us. Need a family to share Christmas with? Rent one from us. Why own an excess of objects when you can access them in under 10 minutes?

AD-VOICE   *"Chomp, here to meet your needs, in a heartbeat"*
           [Read by someone else, with background music, as if it's an advert]

Sound	**→ Chomp ad.mp3**
Location	**approaching bike shop**

AI GUIDE   Turn left, and cross the bridge over the canal. Stay on the left side of the street

SCENE 4

Location	**Bridge before Checkpoint Charlie**
Sound	**[connection sound] [muffled]**

PIETER   Hey – it's me, Pieter, again!

              [connection improves, normal talking]

PIETER   You're now in the Westerparkbuurt, though Chomp
              would tell you this area is West15. It is famous
              for its resistance to flash delivery – that's why
              you still see local people out shopping here.
              Checkpoint Charlie is the nerve centre of the
              resistance. Where I can still find people like me,
              who also rejected what we call 'the flash religion'.
              And you *can* get your beer in under ten minutes!

Sound   **[laughs at his own joke]**

PIETER   We operate our pirate radio servers from here.
              Chomp pollutes the city with their hologram bill-
              boards. And they broadcast commercial messages into
              people's earpieces. But we hack their networks to re-
              mind people there's another way! A human connection.
              Despite our resistance, this street is at risk.
              There's an awesome Toko and an old school Dirk, but
              these will probably become two more of the many shops
              on this street forced to close. I heard rumours from
              one of my buddies at Checkpoint Charlie that Chomp
              is planning to buy out this whole row of shops and
              turn it into one big darkstore.

Sound   **[sigh]**

                              ⌈PAUSE⌉

PIETER   It is rare that you find a human-friendly shop where
              you can actually just wander the aisles, take inspi-

ration from the shelves, feel the products… Most folks just choose a picture of an apple on their phone and wait for it to be delivered. What if I like to hand pick my own fruit and choose the reddest apple? Eat my haring vers van het mes, met uitjes en zuur! Hear the famous stories of the kaas-boer at the market, or bump into an old friend at the supermarket?

AI GUIDE   Cross over the bridge and continue walking straight ahead.

Sound   **[beep, beep, beep]**

AI GUIDE   Warning: you are currently losing points for inefficiency, stay focussed and keep up the pace.

Sound   **→ Bridge.mp3**

Location   **Crossing over De Wittenkade**
Sound   **[whizzing beeping noises, humming city]**
             → Fast car.wav
             → Human bike rider.wav

PIETER   The roads have become so dangerous, those driverless Chomp vehicles are programmed to reach their destination as quickly as possible, no matter what.

Sound   **[add sound of an electric car or bike coming past from really close by]**
             → drone.wav
             → E bike 2.m4a

                         [PAUSE]

PIETER   When Chomp removed the dark stores from small neighbourhood streets, many people felt that the problem had been solved. As long as the riders weren't keeping them awake, the neighbours stopped complaining. You can call me a pessimist, but I knew flash deliv-

ery wouldn't disappear. Look, I understand that you need this job. My son also works for Chomp, he's a UX designer. Everyone has to find work somehow…

Sound [sigh]

PIETER   I guess I just hope that you start this job with your eyes wide open. Hey, there's always the option to come over to the resistance, c'mon, join Buurt-hackers and help us infiltrate Chomp from the inside…

Sound [chuckles nervously]
Location The bakery

PIETER   Oh check this, my favourite bakery is on this street. I buy bread here most days, and I'm always tempted into getting something extra once I smell their pastries. As you walk past, wait for the doors to open, and take in the smell of freshly baked goods.

[PAUSE]

PIETER   Anyway, I better go, the Buurt-hackers team is working on something really *huge*. If all goes to plan, the launch is taking place soon - I can't tell you any more now, you'll have to wait and see - or should I say *hear* - it for yourself!

Sound [sound of breaking up]

SCENE 5

Location   **Van Limburg Stirumplein**
Sound   **[beep, beep, beep]**

AI GUIDE   Warning, You are almost out of delivery minutes.
            Cross to the right side of the street and wait in
            front of the building with the window illustra-
            tions. Watch out for traffic

Sound   **→ Warning sound.wav**
            → Warning AI_v4.mp3

ADA   Oh 42… our connection seemed to break up there…
            It's perfect that the trial delivery algorithm
            brought you via this neighbourhood square. It's
            where you can find a famous landmark in Chomp's
            history. This building you're standing near, with
            all its colourful illustrations in the window,
            is a dark store, and one of the oldest in the
            city - with only humans as riders and pickers.
            No robots or drones! Quite a historical artefact.
            [said sarcastically]

                        [PAUSE]

            This introduction ends here. Now, you only have
            a couple of minutes left to complete your trial
            delivery. Be careful of timing, you are replacing
            rider 36 who —

Sound   **[interruption across the radio signal]**
            → Radio glitch.wav

ADA   What's that sound? What is going on?!
Sound   **[alarm sounds, becomes an hectic moment]**

PIETER   We did it! We've taken down their servers! We are
            now broadcasting live over EVERYONE's earpiece!

```
              People of Amsterdam! HEAR US!
              OUR DEMANDS TO CHOMP:
              Stop the spying
              Respect our privacy
              Remove fake nature
              Save local stores
              We want our neighbourhoods back!
              Our neighbourhood is not your platform!
```

EVERYONE: Viva la resistance! Join the Buurt-hackers!

PIETER   Message to all riders: we have smuggled a special
              card in your package. Join our resistance! There
              is a POstNL orange mail box outside the darkstore
              - USE IT!

Sound   **[alarm fades out]**
              → Alarm.mp3

AI GUIDE   Rider 42, unfortunately this trial delivery has
              been terminated. Please remove the contents from
              your package. We hope you will consider applying
              for future positions with Chomp. Delivery over.

Sound   **[voice shuts down, slow motion till it breaks (AI is killed)]**
              → Game over.wav
              → ending.mp3

NATALIE   This audio walk has now come to an end. From ev-
              eryone at affect lab we would like to thank you
              for participating in this walk. To find out more
              about this project, please visit our website: aci-
              tyeatingitself.net. Chomp chomp. Goodbye!

A CITY EATING ITSELF

(IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

Join a fictional audio walk through
the streets of Amsterdam West

a project by

affect lab

www.acityeatingitself.net

The subsequent pages feature photos from a special edition of the audio walk, which took place in April 2023. Photography by Anisa Xhomaqi.

ChaMP

Keep your drones away
from our homes!
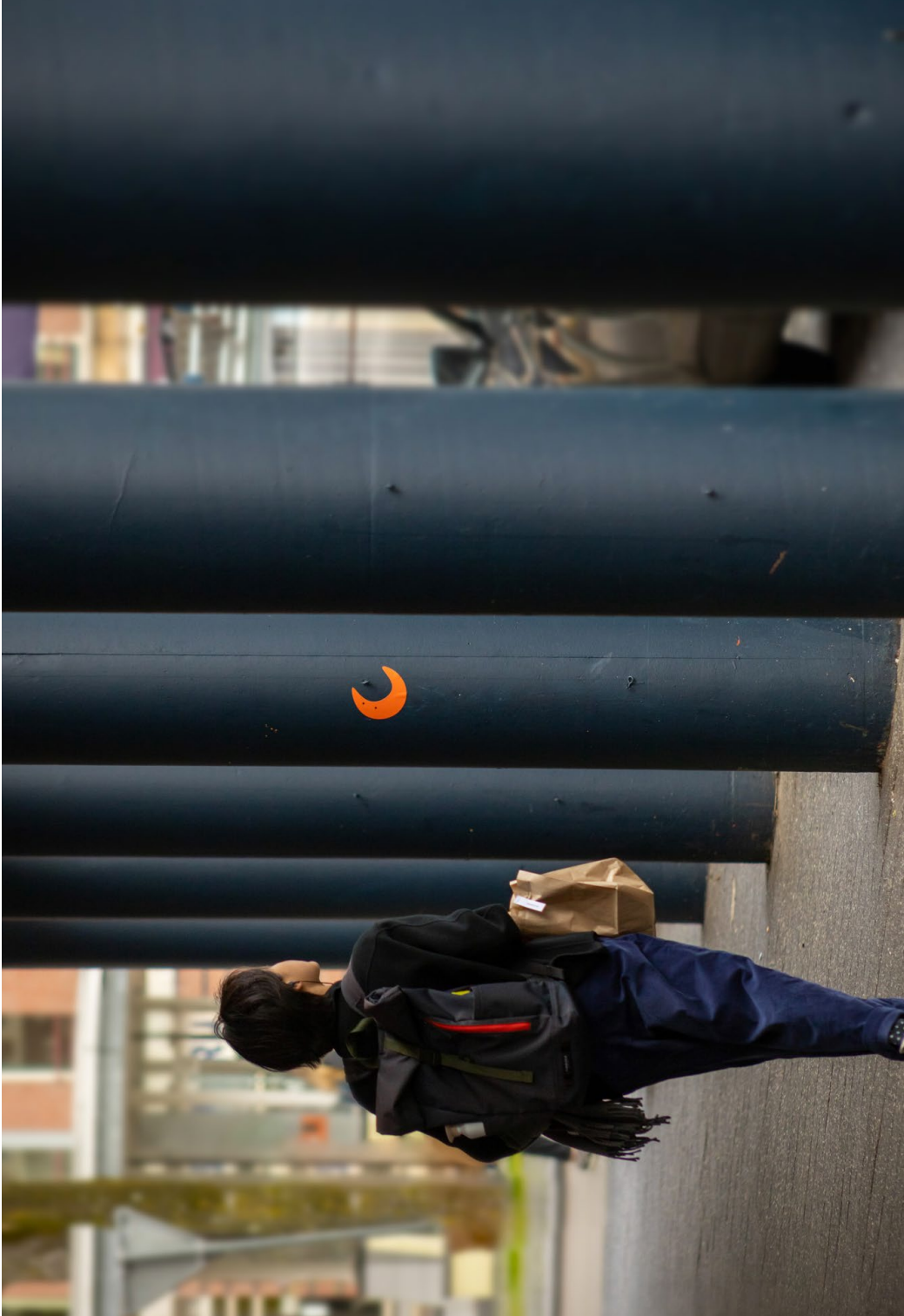
DEAR

QUICK

COMMERCE

POSTCARDS
FOR A PLATFORM

"Message to all riders: we have
smuggled a special card in your
package. Join our resistance!
There is a PostNL orange mail box
outside the dark store – USE IT!"

In April 2023, we invited visitors to a special edition
of our audio walk through the streets of the Frederik
Hendrikbuurt.[1] They embarked on an immersive
walk through a dystopian Amsterdam of 2040.
Witnessing a climactic final stand-off between
local neighbourhood rebels and our fictitious flash
delivery company – Chomp – left visitors deep in
thought, contemplating the future of Amsterdam. And
what did they do next? They grabbed some postcards,
penned down their messages directly to Chomp, and
handed them over to PostNL!

**1 See
Chapter 7:
Flash Forward
for the full
script.**

Rather than treating the audio walk as the final prod-
uct, we wanted it to contribute to the ongoing design
research process, which lies at the heart of this project.
By using postcards, we built a bridge between the
fictional world we crafted and the tangible reality of
flash delivery's continuous influence on Amsterdam.
Though the visitors were writing to a fictitious flash
delivery company, their expressions of hope and fear
for the future of Amsterdam are undeniably real. Their
messages form a powerful collection of reflections,
full of emotions, revealing a genuine desire for change
and collective action in reclaiming the public spaces
of our city.

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

Human,
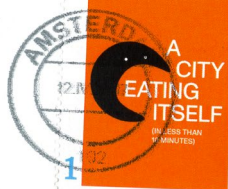
Personal,

Local

A CITY EATING ITSELF
(IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

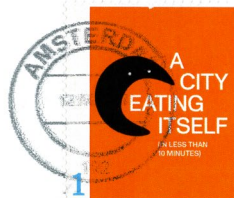Nederland

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74

Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

AS2CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

still walking through the wonderfull streets of amsterdam with their vibrant shops and markets
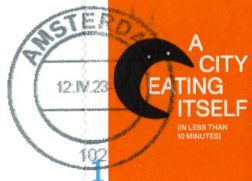
A CITY EATING ITSELF
(IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

Nederland

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74

Wibautstraat 150
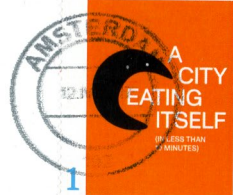
1091 GR Amsterdam

AS2CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

HUNGRY FOR CHANGE! AND GOVERNED BY AN ADMINISTRATION THAT HAS THE COURAGE + MEANS TO RESIST GENTRIFICATION + TAKE CONTROL OVER PLATFORMIZATION PUBLIC ALTERNATIVES TO PRIVATE PLATFORM SERVICES NOW!
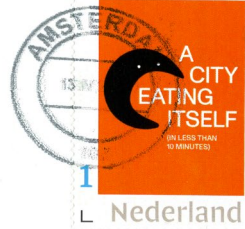
A CITY EATING ITSELF (IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

L Nederland

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74
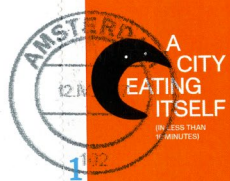
Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

AS2CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

Community - oriented and with open, autonomous & accessible spaces.

A CITY EATING ITSELF (IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)
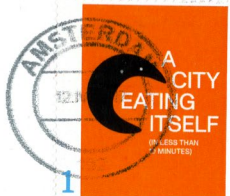
L Nederland

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74

Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

AS2CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

taking and enjoying the time of daily tasks such as grocery shopping, meal planning and cooking. Taking care of ourselves and each other doesn't have to be outsourced to cheap labor or robots, but something we find joy from!

A CITY EATING ITSELF
(IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

1

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Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

AS2CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

wise enough to stop for a minute and consider what it really desires.
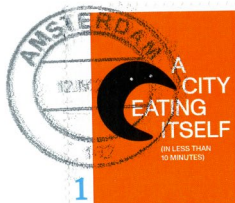
A CITY EATING ITSELF
(IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

1

L Nederland

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74

Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

AS2CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

focused on real sustainability

with room for social interaction and spontaneous meetings in public space
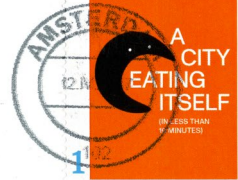
A CITY EATING ITSELF (IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

1 L Nederland

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74

Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

A5200 - #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

I hope that every citizen of Amsterdam will have the right to desires voice their concerns & shape the feature together.

A CITY EATING ITSELF (IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

1 L Nederland

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74

Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

A5200 - #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...
a city where new technologies
and residential wellbeing is
weight of against each other and
can even help to make the
city a nicer place

A CITY EATING ITSELF
(IN LESS THAN MINUTES)

12.11

1

L Nederland

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74

Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

AS2CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

taking the lead in cooperating
own alternatives, keeping the
hungry platforms away...

A CITY EATING ITSELF
(IN LESS THAN MINUTES)

12.11

1

L Nederland

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74

Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

AS2CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

- support small (local) businesses
- talk a walk out for your shoppings
- consume in moderation
- get creative with scarcity
  (for example when you miss
    an ingredient)
- be alarmed of dark stores
  and speak up against them

Thank you for this
fantastic walk!
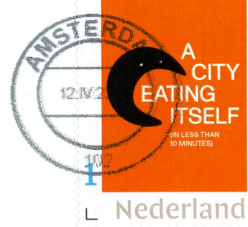
AMSTERDAM 12.IV.23

A CITY EATING ITSELF
(IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

L **Nederland**

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74

Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

AS2CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

gourmand
and
Inefficient

AMSTERDAM 12.IV.23

A CITY EATING ITSELF
(IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

L **Nederland**

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74

Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

AS2CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

filled with households Growing their own food OR joining a food cooperation
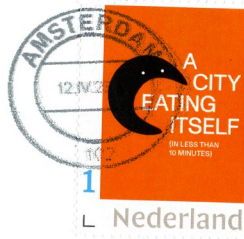
A CITY EATING ITSELF (IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

1 L Nederland

AMSTERDAM 12.IV.2

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74

Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

AS2CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

also a "just" city in which everyone feels welcomed & where everyone can eat!

A CITY EATING ITSELF (IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES)

1 L Nederland

AMSTERDAM 13.IV.2

CHOMP HQ

Studio 0.74

Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

AS1CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

a free city for
ideas, space
and love

A
CITY
EATING
ITSELF
(IN LESS THAN
10 MINUTES)

L **Nederland**

CHOMP HQ

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Wibautstraat 150

1091 GR Amsterdam

AS2CC — #Y237M3A#41#0429#

How can we stop our city from eating itself?

I hope a hungry Amsterdam in 2040 is...

taken care with equitable access to nourishing
food and human connections.

I hope we remain hungry for contact
and to feel the breeze on our face
on our short walks to the store.

I look forward to greeting my
neighbours and wishing them
a nice day.

A
CITY
EATING
ITSELF
(IN LESS THAN
10 MINUTES)

L **Nederland**
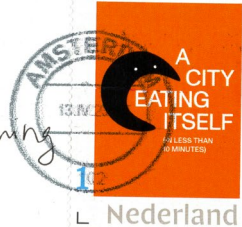
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TOWARDS
A COLLECTIVE
FUTURE

LIVING TOGETHER (WITH AND WITHOUT PLATFORMS)

WORDS BY MINNIE BATES

A City Eating Itself (in less than 10 minutes) began with one aim: to raise urgent questions about how flash delivery is shaping the social fabric of Amsterdam. The platform economy seduces consumers away from traditional brick-and-mortar shops. Instead, they seem to turn to apps to order things for delivery directly to their doors. As a result, we see small supermarkets disappearing because of soaring rents and dwindling consumer demand.

At the same time, dark stores have proliferated across neighbourhoods, driven by the need for new logistical space to sustain flash delivery companies' activity.[1] These changes in the typology of the streets cast a shadow on our social interactions and dynamics, transforming active storefronts into obscured facades. Simple yet vital social interactions – like chatting with the owner of a local take-away spot or friendly encounters with neighbours at the grocer – play a significant role in bringing people with diverse values, cultures, professions, and perspectives together. If small businesses close and dark stores multiply, these moments of co-presence, sociability, and interaction may also come under threat.

1   Shapiro, "Platform urbanism in a pandemic: Dark stores, ghost kitchens, and the logistical-urban frontier," 169.

Through the lens of a residential neighbourhood, the affect lab team researched the ways in which flash delivery influences the everyday urban rituals of Amsterdam's residents. Here, the cloud-based platform is not so cloud-based after all. For the flash delivery platform to carry out its services in a neighbourhood,

and maintain its promise of ultra-fast delivery, it requires, amongst other things, a sprawling network of dark stores, stocked goods, garbage collection, and a local labour force of managers, riders, and pickers.

The relationship between flash delivery and the city of Amsterdam is ever-changing. The local authorities and flash delivery companies continue to provoke each other. Although Amsterdam isn't the only city navigating this complex relationship, it does seem to offer attractive conditions for the industry to thrive.

As this project unfolded, the prominence of flash delivery in many cities shifted. For example, in July 2023, new laws in Paris changed the classification of dark

2 Schofield, "Fast grocery firms doomed by French dark store ban."

stores from 'shops' to 'warehouses'.[2] Prior to this decision, two major flash delivery competitors – Getir and Flink – announced their withdrawal from the french capital. After such unbridled success during the COVID-19 pandemic, stricter regulations and decreased demand continue to take their toll on flash delivery companies in Amsterdam. Still, they persist, continuing their efforts to entice customers while boldly encroaching on public space.

Our research has explored how the flash delivery platform is both a source of contention and disruption to a neighbourhood. But the influence of these flash delivery infrastructures stretches far beyond just the nuisance faced by residents. They have a way of steering people toward more individualistic, and sometimes isolating, consumer behaviours. This led us to ask the question: *How do we want to live together, and what role do these technologies and services play in our communities?* We believe it's fundamental for us to collectively consider the role platforms should assume in Amsterdam's landscape.

A Flink advertisement, "We bezorgen hier" – meaning "We deliver here" – spray painted at the entrance of Amsterdam's Oosterpark. This blatant commercialisation of public space ensures that customers can access flash delivery's convenience even beyond their homes or workplaces, converting this public space into a place of consumption.

Flash delivery isn't the first, and it's unlikely that it will be the last, of these new digital platform-driven services to influence the social and physical fabric of our cities.[3] It's impossible to prepare for all the unintended consequences that design and technological innovations, like platforms, will have on our neighbourhoods. But it's crucial that we continue to investigate and critique them. We hope this book, alongside the neighbourhood intervention and research we undertook, contributes to this ongoing goal.

3 Take Uber or Airbnb and their respective influence on transportation and the housing market, for example.

Our intention is to extend *A City Eating Itself* into more neighbourhoods and cities, and continue to encourage critical speculation about the future of flash delivery and platforms more generally. In this spirit of collectivity, we hope that this publication inspires you to join us on this journey.
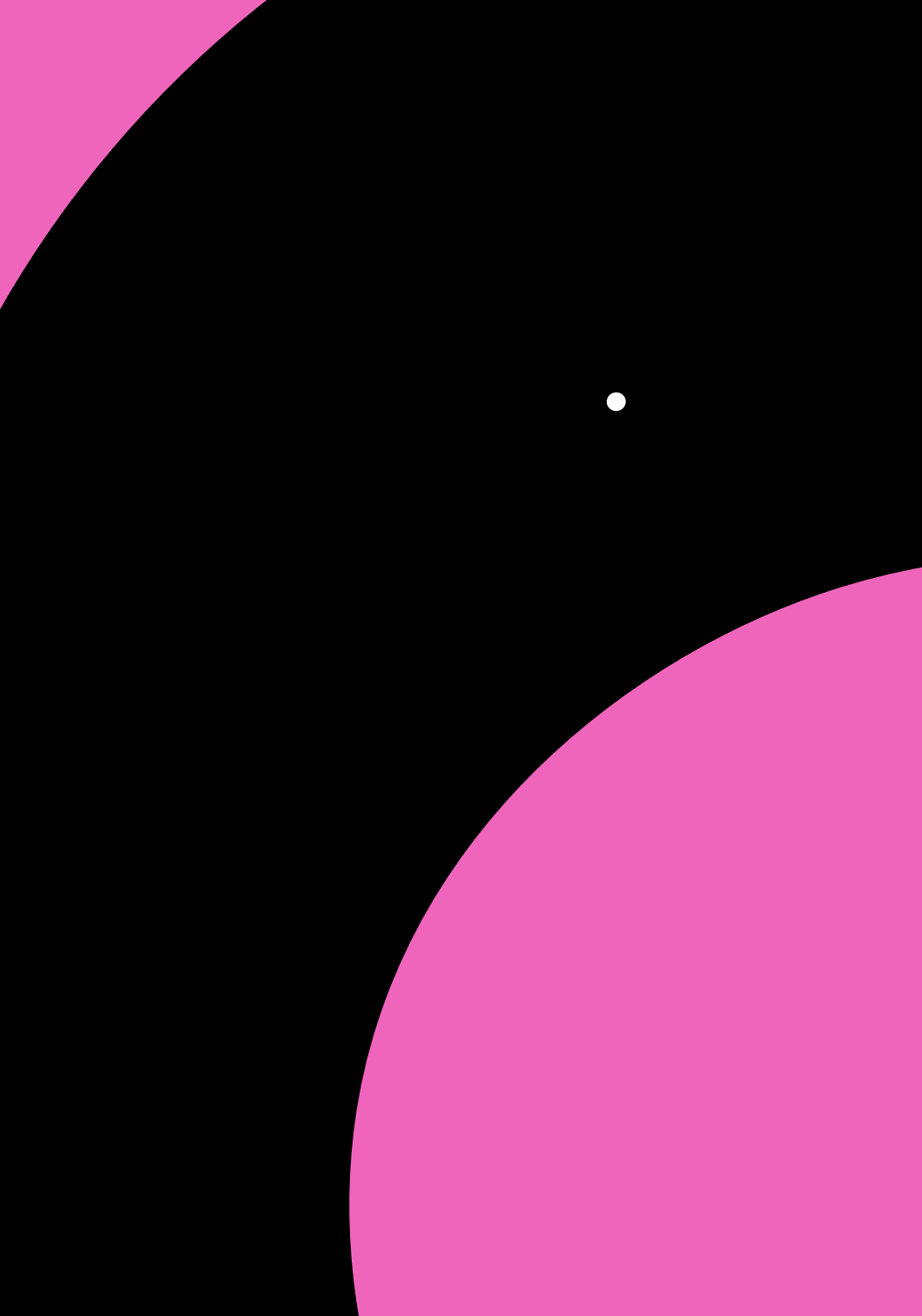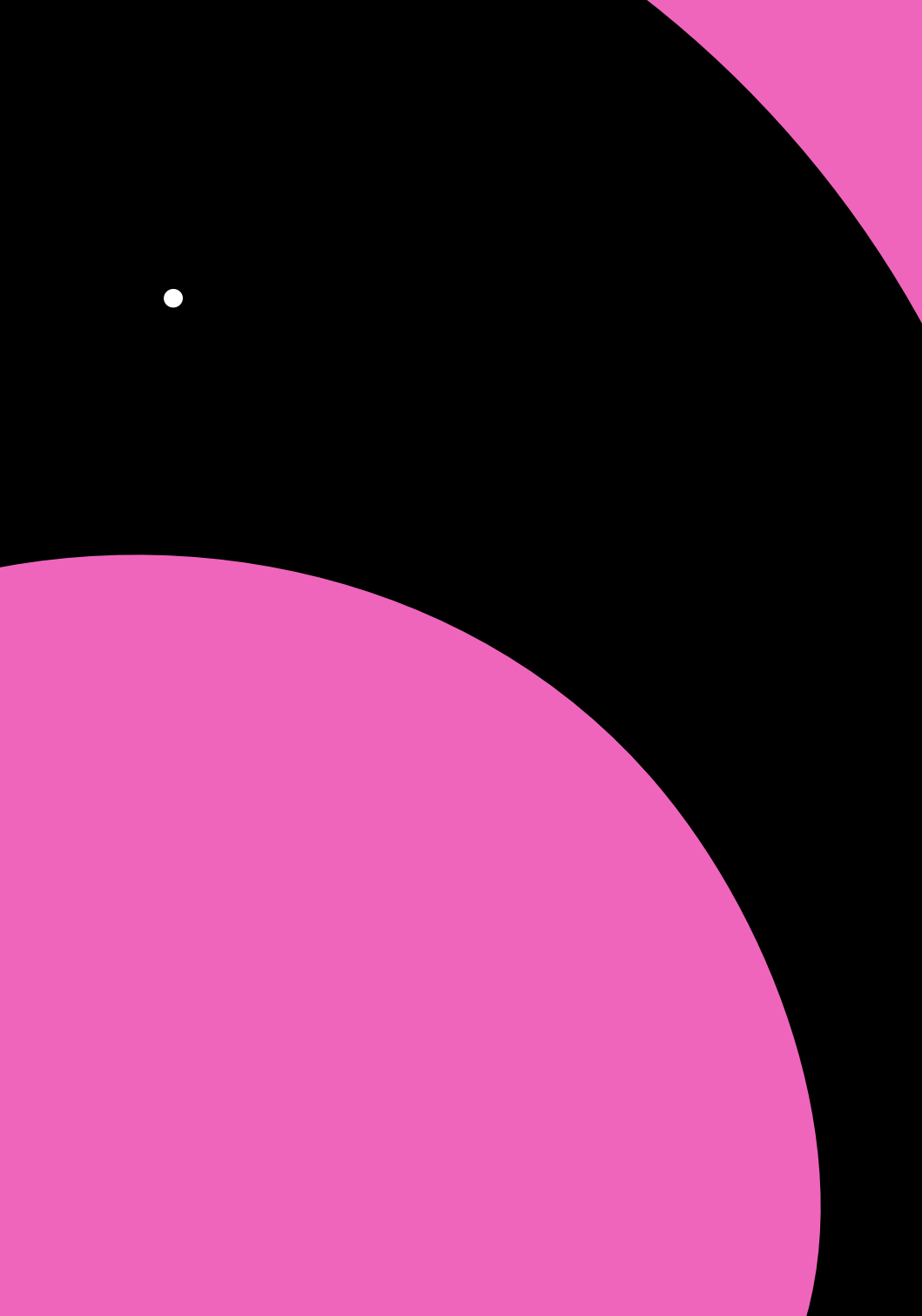
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creatieve industrie

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AK
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kunst

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lab

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