

City as an Infrastructure for Language

A conversation with Experimental Jetset



"Rip it up and start again. Sure, the city is an infrastructure for language—but sometimes this language needs a bit of tearing and folding, just to make it all fit." Experimental Jetset's poster designed for Paradiso turned into an impromptu seating. Photo: E.J

Experimental Jetset is an Amsterdam-based graphic design collective founded in 1997 by Marieke Stolk, Erwin Brinkers and Danny van den Dungen. The trio met at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and have been running the studio together ever since. Their projects range from printed matter and identities to site-specific installations. Their work is strongly informed by language and its various applications: they describe their methodology as “turning language into objects”. They’ve published several books about their work. The latest book *Superstructures* (2021) reflects on their practice through the lens of language and its connection to the city, drawing parallels from the movements Constructivism, Situationism, Provo and Post-Punk.

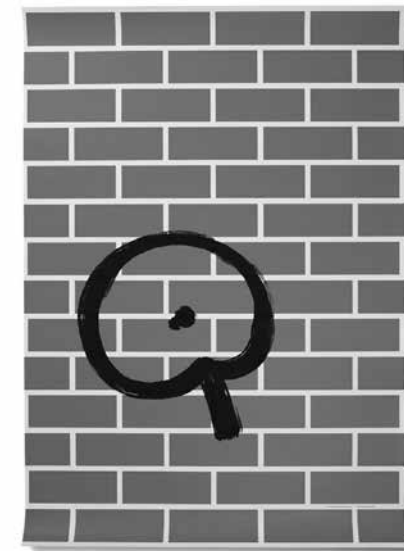
We were eager to talk to them about their work in relation to public space, their daily wanderings through the city of Amsterdam and earlier projects that concern the Provo movement active in the mid-1960s.

We meet the trio on an early spring afternoon at their studio over some tea and cookies gathered around a round meeting table and surrounded by sketches and maquettes from their ongoing and earlier projects.

Elisabeth Klement & Laura Pappa You’ve done a lot of research and different work around the Provo movement. Could you talk a little bit about how the Provos used the city of Amsterdam and how the city became a part of their practice?



Poster for the *Two or Three Things I Know About Provo* exhibition at W139 in Amsterdam. 2011.



Brick wall print with gnot apple for the *Two or Three Things I Know About Provo / Brno Edition* in Brno. 2012.

Danny van den Dungen I think the way they used existing infrastructure had a lot to do with what developed later from the Provo movement: the idea of squatting instead of building new buildings for instance — reusing what was already there. Normally all these movements, such as Constructivism and Bauhaus dreamt of new cities. But I think Provo was more concerned with using existing infrastructure. The same applied to using existing statues and incorporating them into their own narrative.

Our whole practice is based on this idea of reconciling these two opposites—counterculture on the one hand which is based on the idea of reusing everything that already exists such as squatting, a sort of preservation-like impulse, while the other there’s a more classical modernist impulse of tearing stuff down to build something new.

The Provos were also using media infrastructure—they were very media-savvy—so they held meetings and happenings on specific days because they knew it would end up in the newspaper the next day. They were very aware of how the media worked and considering that it was the 60s, newspapers were generally very interested in what young people were doing. The Provos knew very well how to utilize that for their own benefit.

MS They also made their own version of the Amsterdam newspaper *Het Parool* called *Het Pariool* (‘riool’ refers to the Dutch word ‘sewer’, suggesting the idea of the press as a sewer) in which they used *Het Parool*’s logo but played around with it. These types of projects were very much grounded in the Dutch language, so the jokes and

wordplay often go missing when translated into English. This is why it's believed that Provo didn't gain traction outside of the Netherlands because people from the outside simply couldn't access it. Not much of it got translated, or if it did then much later.

When protests were happening on the streets of Amsterdam during the wedding of Queen Beatrix and Claus, who was German and had been part of the Hitler Jugend, there was a lot of police brutality. The Provos were keen to immediately draw attention to the protests and wanted to make an exhibition with photos that had been taken during the protests and printed a catalog with the photos alongside it. They made projects that used all possible tools that were available to them. One of the most beautiful moments I can think of from their projects is from a film clip¹ where you see Jan Wolkers, a very famous Dutch writer, opening an exhibition. This is one of the things I find most inspiring as his father was also a policeman and he explains how police brutality works.

DvdD Wolkers is quite important as he started to call smoke bombs smoke signals—the oldest language in the world. So it all clicked together for us in relation to how language is connected to the streets. When we were working on a new graphic identity for the Le Cent Quatre in Paris² the curators and directors were very interested in the *Arcades Project* from Walter Benjamin. We decided to study it and learned that Benjamin also had an interesting way of describing the city as a kind of collage of advertisement posters and other ephemeral material. He even says that through the street names the city becomes a linguistic cosmos, which heightened our awareness of seeing the city as a sort of structure that you can read. We found that interesting also for describing our own practice as we thought it relates well to what we do on a daily basis.

MS There's also this interesting essay called *One-Way Street* by Benjamin in which he literally puts everything he observes from windows into the essay which again creates a beautiful collage of the city.

DvdD Later on we were invited to work on an exhibition in Melbourne at RMIT University³. We were curious how other movements used the city as an infrastructure for language. This of course differed from movement to movement: Constructivists for



Exhibition *Superstructure* at RMIT University, in collaboration with the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2018.

instance were very interested in the idea of kiosks and pavilions and different architectural structures. We came across an essay about the structures of Gustav Klutsis. He made beautiful sound structures because his kiosks were also made to broadcast speeches of Lenin and others. In a text that an Australian scholar wrote about him she describes these as para-architectural structures, so almost like parasitic architecture or mobile architecture. This kind of semi-architectural structure used as devices for language is something we found quite specific to Constructivism. For each movement we tried to come up with something specific that describes their activities. The Situationists, for instance, were better known for graffiti slogans. We also connected these to barricades which you could also see as punctuation in the city. In the same way that you could have a comma or a full stop in the middle of the sentence, the same way a barricade becomes a punctuation mark.

In terms of the kiosks, we were very interested in how they became an interface between language and architecture because kiosks are used to display magazines or books or to show posters. The Constructivists used these kiosks for propaganda, while the same kind of kiosks in Bauhaus are used for advertisements—the means is the same.

EK & LP It was also interesting to see how these more temporary structures are disappearing in the present. In Estonia you can witness how the last standing kiosks are either being dismantled or becoming this type of ghost architecture that reminds you of the past.

1 Film clip from *Omdat Mijn Fiets Daar Stond* (directed by Louis van Gasteren, 1966): www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZ870MI8_IU.
2 www.experimentaljetset.nl/archive/104-2007
www.experimentaljetset.nl/archive/104-2

3 Exhibition *Superstructure*, March 2018. www.experimentaljetset.nl/archive/superstructure, <http://designhub.rmit.edu.au/exhibitions-programs/experimental-jetset-superstructure/>

DvdD Of course the rise of digital culture plays a big role in this. There was a really nice article in the *New Left Review*⁴ about the death of the newspaper. It begins by describing how you don't see newspaper kiosks any longer in stations and if there are kiosks they are selling everything but newspapers.

EK & LP What is an interesting and awful shift in Amsterdam is that since the first of March 2021 there is a new *reclamebelasting* (advertising tax) in the city which means that any sign that is displayed for longer than three weeks will be taxed. This accounts for public, commercial or even private signs or messages.

DvdD & MS When we were studying at the Rietveld, we made MUPI's for the Holland Festival. MUPI comes from French and stands for *mobilier urbain pour l'information* ("informational street furniture"). It used to be that one side was commercial and the other side was cultural. So one that you approach with your car is commercial and the other side which only the pedestrians see is cultural.

MS I collected money from the companies and put their logos on the poster because with the cultural institutions you always have this graveyard of logos on the posters and I thought that if it goes on like this in the end they will be filled with only logos.⁵



Poster Sponsored by: by PHK (aka Marieke Stolk) for Rietveld Academie & Holland Festival, Amsterdam. 1995.



4 Marco d'Eramo, *New Left Review*, issue 11: <http://newleftreview.org/issues/ii111/articles/marco-d-eramo-rise-and-fall-of-the-daily-paper>
 5 "I was interested in questions such as what is commercial or what is cultural, and what this means for the future of graphic design. If the "parking space" for logos and sponsors takes over completely, are you still able to make

an interesting poster? What if you don't get sponsored anymore? I was still a student, who saw a country turning from a social-democracy that included art and culture as part of the things that was important—into a capitalist country that only sees importance in things that make money, not cost money."

But I really did get paid for all the logos I displayed on the poster. Of course I could've shown a nice, beautiful drawing but I wanted to address the issue instead. Is the poster still cultural when the bottom line is filled with all the logos of companies that are supporting these events? The thing is, I really made quite a lot of money with it (chuckles)⁶. It was quite a weird mix of logos. I went to the MTV headquarters but also to a pet shop. I just told them I was making this poster and that I needed sponsors for it.

DvdD Already for some time people have been complaining about the mob-like structure of the companies that put up advertisements on the street. Because if you just hang a poster somewhere the bigger companies feel threatened, so they immediately go over your material. It's a bit like when graffiti gets covered. I think you are forced to pay quite a lot of money to display anything at all in the public space.

EK & LP What is also changing now is that the cone-like triangle-shaped structures for billboards have been reduced to A1-size frames because very few people can afford the whole large billboard. We've been taking walks around different neighborhoods and documenting structures that are out there and thinking about how all of these types of spaces are becoming completely inaccessible and at the same time there's the emergence of the advertising tax, which is such a clear message that no printed communication is tolerated or allowed unless you're willing to pay for it. Then it's interesting to see what kind of other formats people might begin using and how people find their own ways or cracks in the system that they can use to communicate. It's also interesting to witness what different types of communication come with a certain kind of living situation.

DvdD It's a group of people I'm completely against, but the anti-vaxxers were quite visual during the Covid times by over-pasting QR codes and such. Even if all you have is a piece of paper you can use it to tag existing posters and make a statement outside.

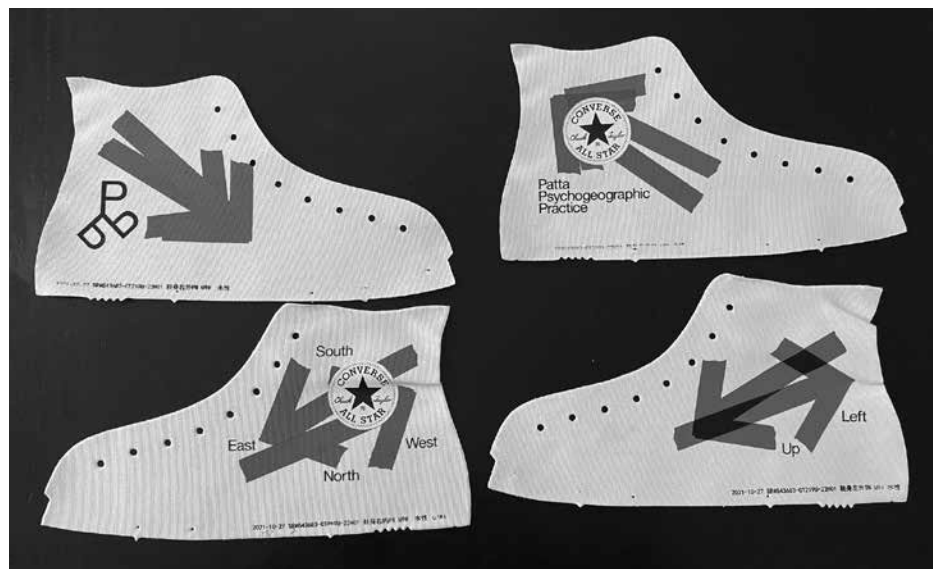
6 The little amount of money that Marieke might have made from it was well-deserved and well-needed for a poor graphic design student. It seemed like a fair wage for the design of a poster (which was originally a non-paid school project).

EJ Even wearing a T-shirt or carrying a poster board. We once did an assignment that was called “Carry That Weight”, which was specifically about sandwich boards. Walter Benjamin also wrote a lot about the figure of the sandwich man. Anyway, there were a lot of really interesting outcomes to that assignment.

EK & LP You’ve of course worked on a lot of different wearables over time such as different T-shirt designs, pins and badges, a protest poncho. It’s interesting to think about how wearable forms of communication of course would be exempt from the advertising tax. A person can themselves become a living and walking advertisement.



Experimental Jetset's works. *The No-Thing Tand Time Pieces / Language Objects* at the *Signals From the Periphery* exhibition in Tallinn, Estonia. 2017. Photos: Karel Koplimeets



Visuals for a pair of Converse ‘Chuck 70’ All Stars as part of a collaboration between Experimental Jetset and Patta, titled *Patta Psychogeographic Practice*. 2022. Photo: EJ

DvdD In *Superstructures* we talk about punk as a kind of kiosk, or people becoming architectural structures themselves, by wearing patches, band T-shirts, spikes. It’s an architectural fashion. This is also very much the language that big brands are utilizing a lot. Of course you could argue that it’s just commercial but it’s also for some young people a way to show off their tribes. Almost in the same way that people wear band T-shirts, now they show that they’re into specific brands which also signals that these people have certain values.

MS Actually before we graduated, in the mid-90s, Danny and I worked on a lot of T-shirt designs—we made hundreds—for a brand called Mac & Maggie. We started really seriously but after fifteen quite OK T-shirts things started to sneak in that were really terrible. We did all these secret things about punk bands, or heroin. Of course, all of it was very ironic but at some point you understand that the people you’re making these designs for don’t really care what you put on them. Looking at it years later, we were also wondering how we were able to do this and get away with it.

EK & LP Going back to the topic of the city: do you think that graphic design lives in this city right now?

MS Well, graphic design does.

DvdD I’m pretty sure, of course we didn’t study this, but the development of cities and the development of language are quite similar. You know, people begin to settle down, they need language to note the stock they have, or that kind of stuff. And then you have the creation of the book press which is of course related to the development of the church, as the first book printed on it was the bible. When you look at it, these histories seem to run parallel—the development of cities and graphic design. Of course we can’t state this for sure but it seems logical.

That is also something that we’re constantly defining for ourselves. The idea of graphic design as the language of the city. I think in the end the city, because of the density and because it is always made by humans, doesn’t have the weight of nature. If everything is made by us, you might as well get rid of the notion of nature altogether.

I think in the paperback (*Superstructures—Notes on Experimental Jetset. Vol. 2*) at some point we say that because language lives inside of us, it is only natural that we want to reverse the situation and live inside of language. For some reason it’s nice to live inside language—whether it is near a bookshelf or some place else. It’s also some sort of sign that you’re surrounded by other humans.

MS I still very much believe in this idea, also in the sense that all these buildings around have been built in a certain period and they embody the ideas of this period and that alone talks to me. I don't necessarily need something on top of that to talk to me. The city talks to me in so many different ways.

When I walk through the streets of Amsterdam on my way to the studio I also see signs that embody the time—the buildings, *rondvaartboten*, for instance — you can immediately notice what time they're from. Things talk to you regardless of what the message is—the message is something that you can change. Of course on foot you see it a lot more than on the bike. You come closer to the people, you see things written on buildings, you see all the books in the free neighborhood libraries that pop up all around the city.

EK & LP Oddly enough there's no turf wars going on around these little libraries—that's a phenomenon that the municipality has left in peace.



Neighbourhood libraries in Amsterdam. Photos: EK & LP

EJ There's one very spectacular one not very far from our studio. It's an old phone booth. I think the typography on it was made by Wim Crouwel. It's now been turned into a very beautiful small library. When you walk from here to the Haarlemmer Houttuinen, there's one library that actually has the classifications for books. It's quite a large collection with a lot of history books and novels and children's books. Almost as though they were a very professional library with librarians and all.

EK & LP What we're mostly concerned with is how this layer of commercial communication has become so prominent and overwhelming—you must notice this all the time because you walk so much how all this material becomes so imposing and oppressive. We've been wondering whether there should be a discussion about getting rid of this layer entirely, or how we could clean the city of all this clutter.

EJ São Paulo introduced a law some time ago, and Turin standardized all their street signs and also used neon. Different typefaces snuck in of course but the idea that everybody has a similar understanding of how to use the signs is very beautiful.

DvdD When it comes to commercial messages, I'm quite good at reading them against the grain—looking at it as one large pop-art collage where all these messages are coming together in really unexpected combinations.

MS They recently took down a really beautiful old Heineken advertisement with two glasses of beer that was on one of the facades on the Leidseplein. There should be more sign preservation. It would be great to encourage people that have businesses to remake their signs, specifically the ones that look really horrible. That would've been something to take on during the pandemic (chuckles)—taking on all the signs in the city.

DvdD Sometimes you come across these images of Keith Haring making these kinds of chalk drawings next to advertisements in the subway. Because he used the infrastructure for these posters to make his own work. But you get an interesting, unexpected dialogue there. Not as an event for commercial culture but I do sort of like how this gives people the chance to react. For instance the wappies—the anti-vax people who paste over QR codes on posters.

That's also one of the great things about print culture in general. The fact that you can put something on top of something else or tear it or cross things out. Images that are not really material become very oppressive—they just float there and you can't access them. When something is in the street as a poster, then you know that it can also be removed in the same way.

I recently saw one of these digital banners in the city where the image of the poster was rotated and really small—that was quite a fun sight. But they're also quite scary because recently they started incorporating cameras to these structures and then they monitor how much time you spend looking at a certain poster, etc. It's a bit like *Blade Runner*.

EK & LP One more element we've been documenting are neighborhood vitrine boxes. For instance the one on the fence of the Oosterpark and another one near the Waterlooplein which are both art initiatives of sorts.



Vitrine box on the Nic de Roeverstraat in Amsterdam. Photo: EK & LP

MS I have to say I don't particularly like these types of vitrines. Can I say that? It's a sort of illustration of democracy. It signals that you can actually show or display something in the city if what you want to do is show or display something. I don't like ideas that illustrate ideas and aren't ideas in themselves. It's actually anti-democracy.

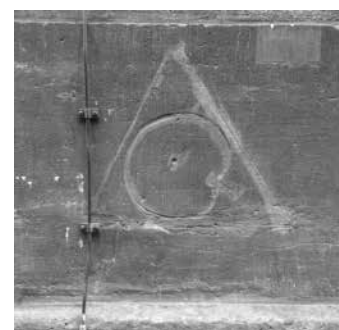
DvdD The infrastructure is already there. There are walls, windows. Not a lot of people do that anymore but there was a time when windows were utilized a lot to advertise certain political parties.

LP During the previous local elections here in Amsterdam I received in my mailbox one of these flyers where somebody had circled the face of one of the candidates with a pen and added a message to vote for this person—quite an incredible effort.

EJ Something else comes to mind. We saw these beautiful feminist posters in Paris where there was one letter per poster. There's been different campaigns by feminists against femicide. In Paris they used this simple A4 system, where each letter got its own sheet. It also seems to be a really efficient system which has since emerged everywhere. I think they've just made a lot of these letters so they can form every possible slogan. It's a very instant, modular system which is very easily reproducible.

LP But it also takes a while to put the whole message up—you'll be arrested half way (laughter).

DvdD I'm suddenly thinking of something entirely different but the city as an archive is also very interesting. Sometimes you can find graffiti that is decades old. On the palace on the Dam Square there is an engraving of Robert Jasper Grootveld of a Gnot apple. It has been there from the mid-sixties. So the idea of a city as an archive—you can see that for instance in Rome where there are all these inscriptions and you sometimes don't know if these are Roman inscriptions or fascist recreations that use the same type. But this kind of layering of time on top of each other which you encounter in the city, something that stays there, is very interesting. Normally you think about structures where things are changing but... you can go all the way back to Pompeii. Of course the earliest drawings in caves were in a way both public art and the beginning of culture.



Gnot apple engraved by Robert Jasper Grootveld in the left side wall (Palaestraat) of the Royal Palace Amsterdam.

When I was a school kid I saw this book called *Een Teken Aan de Wand*⁷, which was a very famous project with posters that had been put up outside. The book was widely available as it came out during one of these book weeks—it was presented to libraries and schools. You saw that book everywhere and I think it had a large impact on people and I think that's how I became aware of Provo.

7 *Een Teken aan de Wand: Album van de Nederlandse Samenleving, 1963–1983*

Een Teken aan de Wand (which translates to 'A Sign on the Wall', referring to the proverbial 'writing on the wall') was published in 1983, in the aftermath of the largest anti-nuclear demonstration that ever took place in the Netherlands (which saw half a million people marching through Amsterdam, protesting against the atomic bomb—on November 21, 1981).

Compiled by graphic designers Marius van Leeuwen and Nel Punt (both mid-1970s graduates from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie), and including essays by renowned Dutch journalist H.J.A. (Henk) Hofland (1927–2016), the paperback features a huge collection of activist posters, pulled

from different sources: feminist factions, anti-war organizations, anti-apartheid committees, the early squat subculture, ecological alliances, political parties, the Provo movement, anonymous art collectives, and many other groups and tendencies.

From the pages, a vibrant image of the Netherlands emerges: a country bristling with restless political energy, and aesthetic urgency—equal parts Pop-Art and Agit-Prop. A mythical country perhaps, one that certainly doesn't exist anymore, which certainly triggers a pang of sadness—but still, browsing through the book, one cannot help but feel energized, even hopeful.

What's particularly interesting is the fact that the book was published within the context of a large-scale promotional campaign. The publication was released

as the 'Book of the Month' by the CPNB ('Collective Propaganda of the Dutch Book', the advertising arm of the publishing industry), which meant that copies of the book were widely distributed, and could be found everywhere—in schools, colleges, public libraries, etc. For many school kids, this book was their first encounter with Provos, squatters, and radical politics in general.

In fact, the book is still very easy to be found—at local second-hand-book markets, copies are ubiquitous, almost impossible to avoid. It's a publication that will forever circulate in the Dutch cultural bloodstream, for decades to come—and rightly so.

EK & LP What's the most relevant part of the entire history of the Provo movement for you as a collective?

DvdD When we were working on the Provo research and exhibitions it was very important for us to clarify that we were looking at the material through the lens of our own practice, background and interests. We tend to look at the material artistically and conceptually, rather than simply as activist propaganda. We're interested in the smoke signals, the city as a platform for language but the actual causes they were fighting against is not our focus. What they did, and the means they used, was of course more conceptually and politically interesting to us. The fact that they showed the city as a democratic platform for language is in the end much more interesting and political than the fact that they were against the queen's marriage. We distinguish between a sort of 'shallow' political message, and the deeper political dimensions (which we situate much more in the area of the conceptual and the artistic—e.g., using the city as a platform for language). To us, the latter (more conceptual, and artistic) sense of politics is in the end more meaningful and subversive than the first (more explicit and activist) sense of politics.

MS Even in the Provo performances there was a lot of printed matter involved. There's a photo of my father with a long jacket on and he had painted bricks on it because the cover of Provo magazine was with a brick pattern. And then he has this really large folder that he also painted and that he put against a statue so it's a kind of Provo magazine. So even in the performances printed matter played a really large role.

DvdD In all the things we wrote about Provo we always put a lot of emphasis on the fact that for the first few issues they used this brick wall pattern as the front of the magazine because we also see it as some kind of a mixture between the street and printed matter. The idea that the Provos used the wall as the printed page and vice versa. Indeed there were some happenings where Rob (Stolk) wore a suit with the wall pattern print on it and he was carrying this cardboard folder that was filled with newspaper articles about Provo. They just carried it around and used it as a centerpiece for the happening. This is quite significant because Provo was one of the first action groups or protest movements that were actively archiving while they were protesting. They were instantly collecting everything.



Exhibition *Two or Three Things I Know About Provo* at W139 in Amsterdam, 2011.
Photo: Maaike Lauwaert

MS We probably don't even know half of their history. Every time someone asks us to get back into it, it is always quite a struggle.

DvdD It's funny that it's a movement that only lasted for two years but you can spend a lifetime studying it.

MS Everything that we've found comes from studying the material. They started with riso printing because it was easy to make a magazine themselves. Soon they wanted to print more copies so they had to learn how to use the offset press. In the end it becomes much more artistic and they begin to use silkscreen instead. It's quite funny to see the transition between working with different materials.

And what's interesting is also how all this printed material remains and can be studied. No democracy without printing. Once we made an exhibition about rare books. Those books were a hundred years old. If there's no electricity, there's no internet. A website from a couple of years ago might already be gone. All the links are broken, someone hasn't paid their bill...

EK & LP Provo was of course very inventive with their communication methods and street actions. I wonder if there have been any spin-offs of similar type of communication activity which doesn't necessarily stem from the same ideology but utilizes similar techniques and formats?

DvdD There's for instance the ongoing flash mob tradition. In *Superstructures* we included a photo of the Book Bloc. It was taken during the London student protests where all the students were making shields in the form of gigantic books with book titles on them. But even though we're all for printed materials, meme culture is quite a big legacy of Provo as well.

EK & LP To bring the conversation back to education, we've also been thinking a lot about what kind of spaces and opportunities students and graduates have available to display their work and express their ideas. Of course for now that medium has mostly been publications but we're curious whether there's room to cross over to other media and other types of dissemination. Art galleries and project spaces are largely reserved for artists—so what are the spaces to show projects that stem from graphic design? For instance that project with logos that you were describing—it sounded like a really amazing opportunity for students to get a larger audience for their work and ideas.

MS Perhaps you should set up a meeting with the municipality to put this on the agenda. There's that system in place where you can drop in for a few minutes to discuss your idea. For once it's also interesting to try to write this down and condensing it to something that can be delivered and performed in a few minutes. It's important to pose these kinds of questions to the city. The city must also have more information on these vitrine boxes and who owns them.



Provo demonstration with an empty banner despite a ban by the Amsterdam mayor on June 30, 1966. © ANP

What Provo did was always going to the highest instances. They arranged a meeting with the head of police for instance. They couldn't organize demonstrations any longer, so instead they came up with the idea of protesting with empty banners. They went up to the police and suggested a ceasefire and to have a football match with the Provos playing against the police. Anyway, their solution was always to reach out to the people that were the highest in the ranks. If you think that the city is yours, then you should just test that as directly as possible.

DvdD I keep thinking of handing out material and pamphlets but also of selling. Provo as a movement made their money to survive by selling their magazines on the street. So young people went to the Provo printer headquarters, picked up magazines and sold them. Half of the money they could keep themselves and the other half they gave to Provo. That is how the movement survived. But it also meant that you had a constant presence of the magazine in the city. So there was a time when people were selling things on the streets. I know nowadays sometimes during demonstrations people are selling the newspaper of the International Socialists.

MS But also the fact that when they want to liquidate the movement, they wanted to print it in a magazine, but then everything was so language-based and ironic, that they were afraid people would laugh and the statement would lose its impact. So instead they printed posters and hung them in the streets, so it was taken more as a proclamation. It was a call for people to come join the Provos in Vondelpark because the Provo movement would be liquidated there. So you also have to know which medium produces the right effect.

EK & LP How do you compare the spirit of the people in relation to the city back then versus now?

MS You have the idea that people were more involved in the city back then. A lot of students came from outside of Amsterdam. De krakers (squatters) got a lot of support from the real Amsterdam people from the Jordaan. They were all backing the students and the squatters because they agreed that it was much too difficult to find housing. With the latest demonstration against the housing crisis there were also again both young and older people showing up. I have the idea that perhaps through Covid people are a bit more inward at the moment, so they see what was better at the place where they live while problems were not so prominent such as Airbnb or city centers without actual people living there. That standstill was actually good to notice how the state of everything was.

EK & LP On the Dam Square there's currently this demonstration wall on some scaffolding against the ongoing war. This in some ways is a little similar to these vitrine boxes we were discussing earlier, as they provide this "lawful" space to express oneself. But that is of course in many ways also there to suppress other, more free and immediate forms of communication.

MS There is also something quite Dutch about providing people with a little bit of space. Just to signal that they have their democracy.

EK & LP That's then quite interesting about the Provos in how they managed to utilize the city and be creative about their methods.

MS Of course the time was different too. We came out of the war. Parents were only interested in capitalism and having a car. So all these young people saw their parents wanting to have a perfect life. So from the viewpoint of the youth the issue or emergency rises again. Nowadays there's seemingly fewer issues to rebel against, which of course also not true.

DvdD Even though I'm always more team print than team digital, I think maybe in 20 years time or so people will look at the memes that have been produced in the same way that we're now looking at all those Paris '68 posters. Perhaps there's something similar about the spirit and influence. The culture wars and stuff that happened in the states with Trump winning, etc, had also a lot to do with these meme wars.

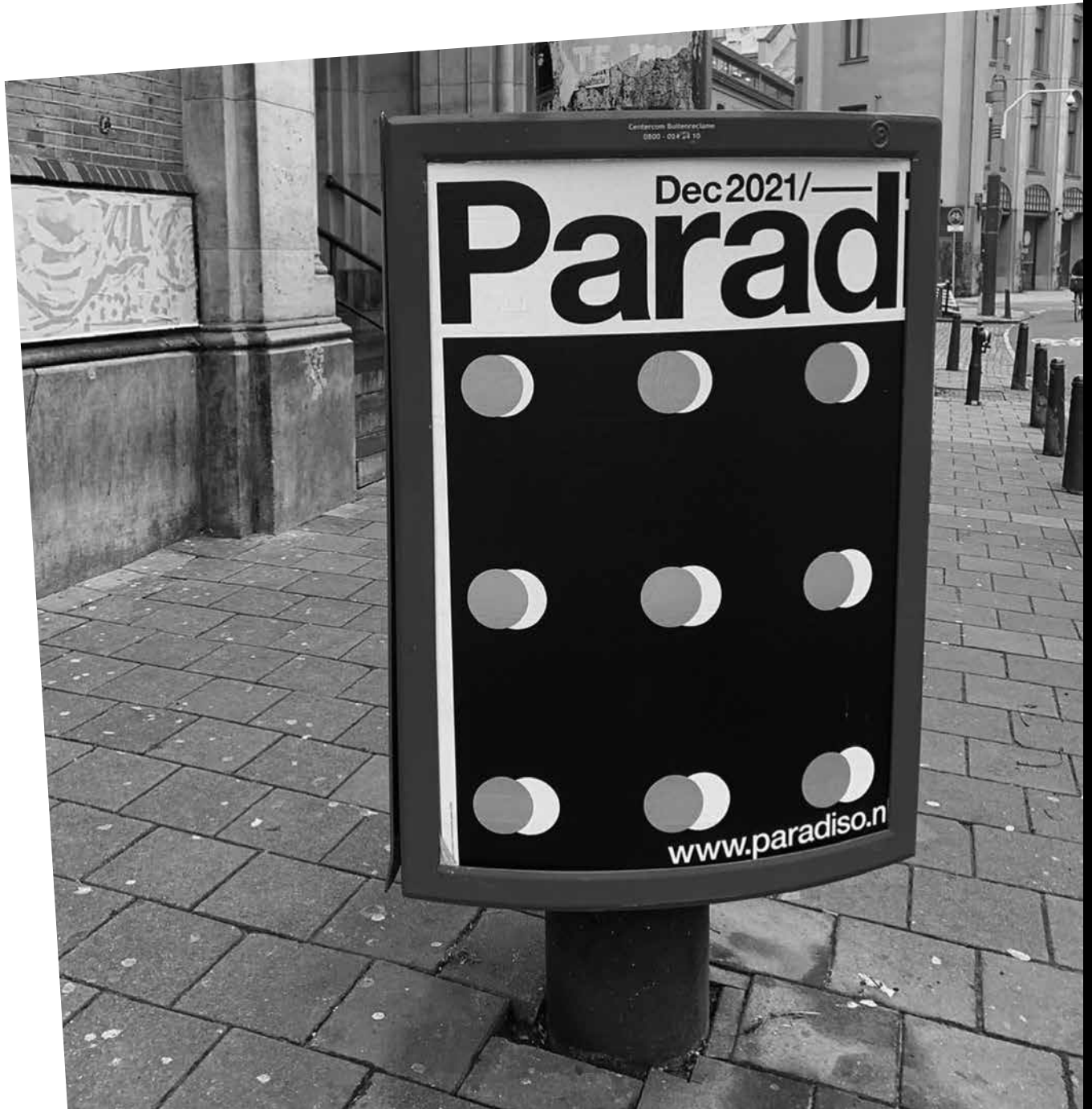
MS What I found very scary now is that since people came out with fake news, you don't understand anymore what the real news is. News is of course also subjective in a way. It's not only what people themselves share but also materials that newspapers and news broadcasts put out.

DvdD You also get this bizarre double bluff now: fake news is created to accuse others of producing it. So you have to be quite critical of how you interact with material that you're fed.

MS Hansje van Halem made a project many years ago where she transcribed the news every day in relation to something that had happened just to notice what changed in the way people were talking about the issue and telling the story. It's interesting to see how the angles change.

DvdD For a long time artists and postmodern philosophers were quite critical of the idea that there was such a thing as objective empirical truth or that news could in general be true. Now we are in this situation where all news is subjective and nothing is actually true. But now everybody seems really unhappy with it. It makes for a very unstable reality. In the 60's-70's a lot of people were very critical of the idea of an objective truth.

EK & LP Now it's apparent who owns the narrative.



Experimental Jetset's poster designed for music venue Paradiso during the Covid lockdown. 2021. Photo: Geert van Itallie

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