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# An Ontology of City, Art, and Time: Plotting the Work of Fra Paalman

Floris Paalman

## Abstract

This article examines the artistic work and practice of Fra Paalman in order to rethink the relationship between art and the urban environment. It attempts to move away from the concept of urban art as capturing a fragment of a certain time and place in a city, given how such theoretical frameworks always imply a sort of ‘ideal city,’ or an imagined wholeness.

Instead, Paalman’s art is explored for how the city becomes spatially integrated into, and temporally traversed by, the artwork, and vice versa. Through this, the article uses Paalman’s artwork to demonstrate how urban ontology is temporal, and acts as a composite and integration of various levels of experience.

*In memoriam Fra Paalman (1945-2020)*

## Introduction

Workshop, time-machine, *Wunderkammer*, repository—this is how I saw the studio of my father, Fra Paalman. When I visited him there, he used to show me his latest work, like his etchings with city scenes, but also rediscovered old works, like his collages of the war in Vietnam. Once he showed me a portrait, painted fifteen years before. I remarked that there was something wrong with the eyes. He took a brush and changed it immediately. I was perplexed. Since my father had taught me to date my work, in order to be able to trace a (my) development, how could he intervene in an expression of a particular moment in time? He responded that he simply added a second date on the back of the work. Later on, I found out that several of his paintings had two or three years mentioned.

For Fra, things from the past could always surface again, and current things could always be revisited later. While he made artistic *objects*, he also saw them as part of *processes*. This made me interested in how his art emerged. Many of his works relate to the built environment as a place *to be*, how it provides references for memories, and enables orientation in space and time. In this way, I have become interested in how built structures create a sense of reality. The monumentality of buildings can suggest permanency, but this is, however, most often only an illusion the city creates. Perceiving its *Gestalt*, its appearance, shaped by different components, depends on scale and timeframe: a city is always changing. But if cities are in a continuous state of becoming, what exactly is presented by an artwork showing a city scene? Can such an artwork show anything other than a fragment of a particular moment and place?

Fragmentation has been a key notion for understanding the modern city (Bodnar; Lathouri; Jacobs 382). This relates to the epistemological problem that we can never understand a phenomenon entirely, and hence, that its expression can only be a fragment of an unattainable whole. While cities are spaces that potentially allow for direct sense

perception, they are nevertheless too complex for individuals to fully grasp, due to simultaneity of movements and developments, and diversity of people. Fragmentation, expressing this experience, is, however, a generic notion that refers to an ‘ideal’ city, rather than actual cities in which people make a living for themselves. Each city has its own logic of being, or *Eigenlogik* (Löw 896). This is based on physical assets and local knowledge developed through collective experience and (self-) representation, values and ideas, which the city’s residents (and others) propagate and reiterate. The resulting identity of a city is constantly being updated (Löw 900). Art participates in this formation by envisioning and monitoring it. Art is therefore part of the urban ontology. Art emerges within an environment to which it responds and in which it finds its place. This environment is sometimes explicitly visible in an artwork, but more often implicitly, through allusive references, and tacit (local) knowledge, including specific values and ideas. These ‘ontological relations,’ as I propose to call them, each with specific spatio-temporal coordinates, are crucial to understand the artistic rendering of the city. The main question, therefore, is how an artwork’s ontological relations existing within an urban context can be recognized as features of the artwork.

Instead of fragmentation, *Eigenlogik* suggests coherence. It can be related to Julian Steward’s theory of cultural ecology, who distinguishes different levels of integration, from a household to society at large (49-50). Integration indicates a state in which different activities and expressions make sense in relation to one another. While fragmentation is a whole falling into parts, integration is a bottom up process that does not imply a given whole, but creates a composition out of different elements. At what level(s) do artworks enable integration?

Rather than conducting a ‘case study,’ where the particular instantiates the general, I will carry out artistic research to examine a dialectic of thinking and acting within a particular environment. Along with the research presented here, I also produced a documentary film, for which I followed and interviewed my father between 2013 and 2015. Fra’s studio served as the arena, and informed my method of audiovisually mapping time and space. Based in Hengelo, a city of about 80,000 in the province of Overijssel in the east of the Netherlands, the studio

became a place in which the environment was reflected.<sup>1</sup> As a corollary to the shooting, Fra and I have archived his work and documentation. In 2016 he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, and gradually withdrew from the project. This condition could inform another project, but here I focus on an urban ontology of art and time.

## Mapping Coordinates

Euphrasius (Fra) Paalman was born in Hengelo, in 1945, and studied graphic design at the art academy, AKI, in Enschede. In 1966 he began his career at the Staatsdrukkerij in The Hague and in 1968 he established his own practice as a graphic designer and visual artist. He was primarily inspired by his immediate surroundings, which also motivated his organizational activities and affiliations.<sup>2</sup> Fra was invested in the appeal of ordinary things. He recognized in them a quotidian strangeness, and so he easily moved between realism and surrealism. For him, an artwork should emerge from a need, mental or social, small or big, self-initiated or commissioned, as long as it is sincere, rather than motivated by 'improper reasons' ("*oneigenlijke redenen*," Fra would say). Fra stressed intrinsic potential.

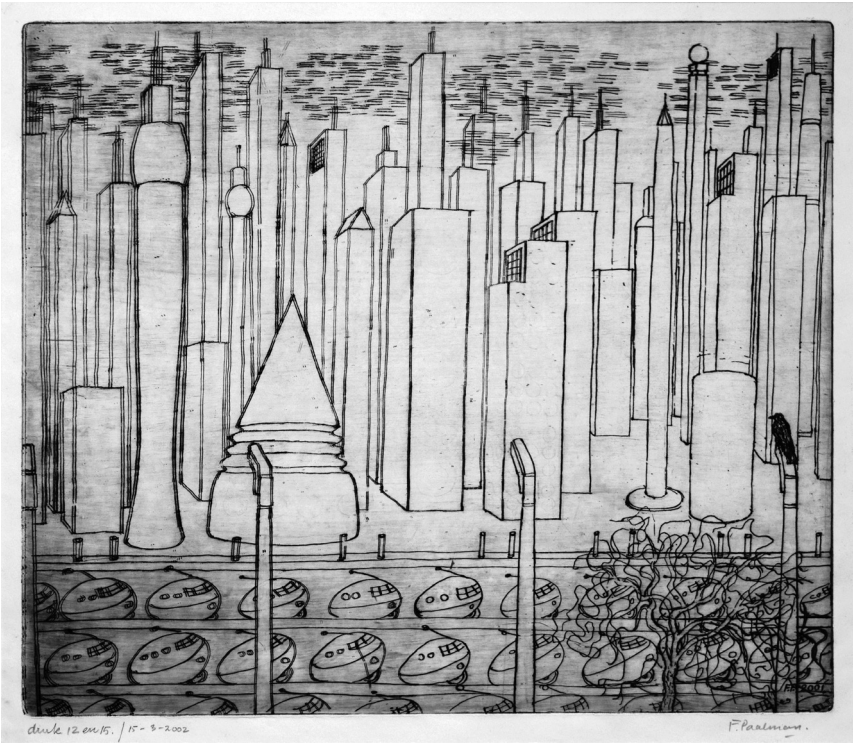
For more than forty years, Fra had his studio in Hengelo. He referred to it as *atelier*, or *Emmaweg*, which was the name of the street where it was located, called after Queen-Regent Emma (in power in the 1890s). But this small street was (and is) far from anything royal, with its odd mix of cafés, restaurants, coffeeshops, a brothel, an antique shop, a Turkish grocery, a few more shops and studios, a former orphanage, and some houses. Located between the city centre and the industrial district with its metal factories, the street served as a corridor, delineated on one end by the crossing of a small stream, which had driven the early industrialization of Hengelo, and by a railway viaduct on the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Buren 56.

<sup>2</sup> In 1988-2013, Fra was chairman of art foundation 'Ag,' and for more than 40 years board member of SWWK, a foundation accommodating artists in Hengelo. Fra frequently contributed to *Museum voor Hedendaagse Hengelose Kunst*, a virtual museum curated by Ricardo Liong-A-Kong. See [www.mhkh.nl](http://www.mhkh.nl). Fra was also locally active for the *Socialistische Partij*, see "Eén van de 27.291: Fra Paalman." *Tribune* 2 (2002-02-22).

other. Adjacent streets housed, among other things, a Syrian Orthodox church, a synagogue, a Bethel Pentecostal church (former city library), and the central post office, once an emblem of Hengelo's reconstruction.

The atelier was an old building, with two floors, which had previously been a greengrocer's shop. It was never altered, and still had big windows that Fra used to display his work. In the backyard stood a giant walnut tree, once planted by the grocer. The atelier was Fra's outlook, and a point of condensation; the perceptual and physical material he gathered was mapped here. Hengelo is often identifiable in his work, but sometimes he drew imaginary cities. Exemplary is the etching "Stad met kraai" ("City with Crow," 2002), showing fantastic skyscrapers and capsules driving by, watched by a crow sitting on a lamp post (see image 1). Through a contextual reading, however, it can still be related to Hengelo. As Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson contend, context does not explain the work, but the work directs the observer to a context, while opening up lines of signification (179). The etching shows slim towers, as a response to the (plump) highrise offices that were being erected around the corner, as part of a redevelopment project. Notwithstanding its industrial character, Hengelo is a green town, with many birds, which always attracted Fra's attention. In the etching, the crow has become an alienated observer, watching the new environment, in which cars look like big eggs. Through this 'bird's eye perspective,' Fra extrapolated local tendencies. Starting with the period of industrialization, and fueled by the city's reconstruction after World War 2, Hengelo is characterized as being both forward thinking and pragmatic. This has resulted in industrial and architectural achievements, but new plans are not always proportionate or based on a comprehensive understanding of conditions, as the city is largely oblivious to its history while downplaying its qualities, due to false modesty.



**Image 1.** Fra Paalman. “Stad met Kraai,” 2002

“Stad Met Kraai” is akin to another etching—of which many versions exist, next to a painting—of a dark, layered metropolis, titled “Brink, veldzijde” (“Village Square, Field Side”, 1998; see image 2). *Brink* is the name of a square in Hengelo, with the word originally indicating a communal space at the edge of a hamlet. This work links up with a photographic booklet, *Het dorp Hengelo in 1977* (*The Village Hengelo in 1977*), which Fra had made, together with architect Henk Methorst, as a study to map the remaining village structure. It served as critical input for the municipality’s planning policy that had previously only been aimed at modernization.



**Image 2.** Floris Paalman. Film still (2015) of Fra Paalman with “Brink, veldzijde,” 1998, 2000.

With the city entering and being processed in the atelier, the atelier itself also features in some of Fra’s paintings; it is a direct link between Fra’s environment and his art mapping it. With reference to the graphic technique of plotting, each artwork can be understood as a ‘plot,’ a graph visualizing Fra’s pathways and coordinates in time and space, with each work being an emplotment of things he encountered. Researching his work through film, as an extension of his plotting, I have developed a moving atlas of his works, informed by Tom Conley’s book *Cartographic Cinema*. This text sees film as maps of various phenomena, where and how they emerge and disappear again. By showing this, cinema maps itself too, inferring when and where recordings have been made, which spurs a “debate about ontology and history, about being and its vicissitudes...” (Conley 3). In order to plot Fra’s coordinates, I drew a conceptual map of his studio, in which I recognized different ‘time zones,’ and this served as a script for the shooting of the film. This has been a method to understand our position in the world, “tying one’s actions in a particular place to the idea that they might, in the best of all utopian scenarios, bear on the world at large” (Conley 19).



## Urban Scale

I have asked whether art showing a city scene can be anything other than a fragment. The implication of a fragment, however, is the existence of a whole. According to urban sociologist Judit Bodnar, “Fragmentation is an implicitly conservative term, it is retrospectively oriented and suggests loss: a unity that had existed is now fragmented” (174). At the same time, she says, fragmentation makes a new unity possible. This view, however, still presupposes a theoretical unity, how things should be according to an idea of wholeness. It means singularity: different things are merely constituents of a totality, rather than beings of their own.

‘Fragmentation’ belongs to an established “city discourse,” including tropes such as ‘unexpected juxtaposition,’ being ‘alone in the crowd,’ and ‘rhythm of the city’ (Brunsdon 223).<sup>3</sup> This discourse presents a generic idea of ‘the city’ (210), without distinguishing between urban scales and different forms of urbanism. It fails to address historical context and local specificities, whether spatial or social. Brunsdon has raised these issues in regard to London, but this problem becomes even more acute when studying smaller cities, which are numerous.<sup>4</sup> In the context of research in Darmstadt, Germany, Martina Löw has addressed the problem as follows:

[T]he question arises as to how, in an urbanized world, cities become integrated into the life world and how they condense knowledge as shared destiny in both synchronic and diachronic as well as in local, regional, national, supra-national and global terms. (900)

Through these scales, it is possible to specify the contexts in which art makes sense, how art is not part of one whole, but different ones. In

<sup>3</sup> Brunsdon mentions other common expressions too (e.g. disregarded detail; fleeting glimpse of beauty; scarred building). For an example of this discourse (and a summary of sorts), see Presner 451.

<sup>4</sup> More than 40% of Europe’s urban population live in ‘intermediary cities’ with 50,000 < 1,000,000 inhabitants (UCLG 54).

reverse order, I will address the scales Löw mentions and how the network of art traverses them.

In global and supranational terms, small towns have gotten new prospects since the nineteenth century. When Hengelo, and its neighbour Enschede, became industrial centres in the 1860s, producing machinery and textiles respectively, they assumed positions in an emerging, fine-grained international network. Consequently, the art academy AKI was established to serve the industry, which maintained international contacts too. In fact, one of the first commissions Fra received after graduating was a project to design booklets and forms for the European Community (now European Union). Vice versa, the academy also attracted foreign students, as well as students from across the Netherlands. After graduating many of them stayed, or came back to exhibit, for example with the foundation ‘Ag’ in Hengelo, where Fra was active. Internationally as well as nationally, connections were thus maintained and anchored locally, which helped to create a cultural climate in Hengelo and Enschede, in which interest groups and professional organizations have emerged. This contradicts Judit Bodnar, who says that “[c]onnections become routinely produced on the global level at the price of the increasing fragmentation of lower levels. Most prominent are the losses in the integrating role of the city and of the old notion of society” (190). However, new forms of organization have emerged, with integration taking place both (inter)nationally and locally.

In their book *Literary Second Cities*, Lieven Ameel, Jason Finch, and Markku Salmela have pointed to the importance of relationships and functionalities of second cities (read: non-capitals), and the actual experiences of their populations, in order to understand the reasons for the existence and the characteristics of these cities (5). Second cities perform specialized functions within regional networks of cities. This also applies to Hengelo,<sup>5</sup> and it can be observed in Fra’s work too. Exemplary

<sup>5</sup> This regional network, called ‘Bandstad Twente’ or ‘Netwerkstad Twente,’ includes the municipalities Wierden, Almelo, Borne, Hengelo, Enschede, and Oldenzaal, with a population of app. 400,000 inhabitants. “Bandstad Twente krijgt prijs van Europese Commissie.” *Trouw*, (1995-03-24): p 9; “Netwerkstad Twente,” *Regio Twente*, n.d. [www.regiotwente.nl/netwerkstad/stedelijk-gebied/55-netwerkstad-twente](http://www.regiotwente.nl/netwerkstad/stedelijk-gebied/55-netwerkstad-twente). Accessed 28 Feb. 2020.

are his designs made for the BKR, a national policy to support artists, which was initially executed by individual municipalities.<sup>6</sup> In the 1980s, however, municipalities in the Province Overijssel started to collaborate. This joint venture was carried out in Hengelo, and Fra was asked to design its corporate identity, indicating a regional level of integration.

Bart Keunen, positioning what he calls the ‘mediopolis,’ speaks of “states of aggregation” (29): configurations through which cities functionally connect. Cities are complementary to each other due to their differences. Quoting Ernst Bloch, Keunen speaks of “the non-simultaneity of the simultaneous” (28). Between cities, but also within them, elements that have originated in different periods create urban hybridities, which are also frequently subject of artistic representations (30). This is exemplified by Fra’s “Brink, veldzijde,” in which the historical hamlet’s communal space of the *brink* is brought into contact with metropolitan space. In between the skyscrapers, one also finds the neo-gothic St. Lambertus basilica, one of Hengelo’s iconic buildings, now reduced to a tiny element in an enormous urban complex. The *brink*, basilica and skyscrapers are metonymical elements of different “states of matter” (25), a concept Keunen has coined to describe the different shapes of cities. They have different histories and are in different stages of development. By combining these states, Fra has plotted the struggle of a city to define its identity, when it finds itself in between different development models.

Individually or as part of ‘Ag,’ Fra responded to the city in various ways, such as exhibitions, publications, and interviews, and so he has participated in envisioning and monitoring Hengelo’s *Eigenlogik*, or intrinsic logic (Löw 896). Löw remarks that this logic is constantly updated, but “the experience of the *we* in a city and as a city does not mean that that city homogenizes experience” (898). Individuals constitute the collective experience, affecting in turn the individual one, but the latter might still be different.

<sup>6</sup> BKR = *Beeldende Kunstenaars Regeling*, see: Kuyvenhoven.

## Experience and Cognitive Integration

While in sociology ‘collective experience’ is an entity in itself, ‘the general’ is only knowable by what an individual can ultimately grasp of it. How does the individual experience of the city take place, and how is it expressed and recognizable in art?

Sociologist Karl Mannheim regards experience as incorporation: “Things may well remain ‘out there’; but what we take of them into ourselves is a fusion between them and our self, and our knowledge of them is not a distancing, but rather their reception into our existential repository” (qtd. in Löw 899). Löw understands this incorporation happening through sense perception and “the embedding of experience” (899), which she relates to Hans-Georg Gadamer’s phenomenology of the city. Gadamer stated that the city is a world “whose *gestalt* slowly becomes apparent to its inhabitant in much the same way as it itself emerges from the historical process of its growing to its never quite finished and completed *gestalt*” (qtd. in Löw 899). Gadamer thus draws an analogy between an individual who gradually grasps the city—through lived experience—and the way the city comes into being. I see the common denominator in *integration*, how different activities and impressions make sense in relation to each other.

In the mind, new impressions become incorporated into existing knowledge and inform mental maps (Conley 18-19). These maps are not always coherent, as people may simply not think coherently, and they change over time. However, as acting individuals, people integrate experiences pragmatically. Integration is situational, based on what people sense might be relevant, in order to serve particular purposes. Experience is therefore not simply accumulative, but is based on practice, where already stored and mapped knowledge, in tandem with cultural patterns and learnt theories, help filter and direct perception.<sup>7</sup>

Impressions gathered at different moments create mental maps with different layers of time, like stratigraphic maps. But layers of time also merge. Similarities between stored images create cognitive patterns, as with routines, or when frequenting the same place. At a fundamental level, this already occurs when watching a film: human cognition

<sup>7</sup> As known from cognitivist film studies (Bordwell 46).

renders single frames into a pattern of movement. Besides merging, meaningful connections are made too. This can be recognized in the collages that Fra made early on, and continued to make. The results are composite images, place-holders of temporary states of integration. They do not presuppose wholeness or singularity, but plot an open-ended development. This is also the case with Fra's paintings with multiple dates that triggered my curiosity in the first place.

Elements that inform one's experience become integrated in the mind. But how, in turn, does the resulting artistic expression relate to the world? Notions such as synecdoche and metaphor have commonly been employed to explain the implications of the particular, how, for example, an individual story represents a social condition, or how a certain picture represents a category. The object studied is then taken for what it says about something else, which is a semiotic problem, of an antirealist nature (Bal and Bryson 174). Moreover, the particular is converted into a vehicle to understand the general. But what can be said about the thing itself, which has its own presence and logic of being?

I often asked Fra what he thought about a certain artwork. He was always reluctant to formulate its meaning. 'Meaning' refers to something else, which reduces the artwork to illustration, while postponing experience and effacing contemplation. Irrespective of the work being abstract or figurative, Fra would say that it resembles itself. However, he was interested to see how an artwork (or any artefact) originated from a specific condition and how it related to other objects. Art could actively and self-reflexively respond to such a condition, and elaborate on it. With my camera I traced and plotted such conditions and relations, "re-presencing" them (Sobchack 323), extending, audiovisually, Fra's endeavours.

An artwork is the condensed experience of the author in relation to the surroundings, which can be unpacked by the onlooker. This can be exemplified by one of Fra's gouaches, "Tak met walnoten," showing walnuts, in their husks, hanging on a branch. The branch implies the existence of a tree, which is not visible. This particular tree could have been found at Fra's studio (could, because it was cut down after Fra left the atelier). Such a picture is what Meyer Schapiro (in his polemical

response to Heidegger) calls “the still life as a personal object” (427). The walnuts are not categorical, but specific; they existed at a certain moment, and were probably eaten by my father later on. The branch was like an *objet trouvé*, painted to preserve it, as a record of Fra’s own presence and experience at a certain time. It implies Fra’s act of noticing the fallen branch, realizing that the nuts are no longer part of the tree but still not entirely separate from it, and his act of bringing the branch inside and painting it. This process of artistic observation, thinking and acting is the artwork’s context and condition of existence.

Since context is part of how one understands the artwork, this causes a problem of how to determine its signification. Within semiotics, context is an indefinite extension of text (Bal and Bryson 177). But Bal and Bryson also suggest that each artwork points to its own context. The painting of the walnuts, for that matter, points to the studio’s entourage. Its signification is determined by the environment of Fra’s practice. Watching the gouache, few people may think of the city. But what is depicted was found in the backyard of the atelier, and this creates a different picture, as its significance is not only determined by what is shown, but also by what is not. The nuts in their husks imply the existence of a branch, which is depicted. In its turn, the branch implies the existence of a tree, while the tree implies an environment in which it grows. In the artwork, the city is “present in absence” (Sobchack 325); this ontological relation between city and artwork is an implied feature of the artwork.

## Presence and Time

Instead of ‘representation,’ film scholar Vivian Sobchack focuses on ‘presence’ (326) in order to rethink the concept of historiography. Besides historical artefacts (like media devices), Sobchack’s argument also applies to artworks. Firstly, artworks *are* historical, being made at a certain moment within a certain context, and seen later in another context. Secondly, both historical artefacts and artworks refer to other contexts. Whereas representation bypasses the object as an ontological being, ‘presence’ puts the object centre stage, from where it points to a

context, “with lines of signification opening out from the work of art” (Bal and Bryson 179).

According to Sobchack, (historical) ‘presence’ manifests itself in between two extremes.

At one extreme, *presence* is defined as the literal transhistorical (yet not ahistorical) transference or relay of metonymic and material fragments or traces of the past through the ‘here and now’—where and when these can be activated and thus realized once again in our practical, operative, and sensual engagement with them. [...] At the other extreme, presence is defined as a consequential but *illusory* (and elusive) *effect*. Reminiscent in function of Roland Barthes’ *punctum*, the fragment or trace pierces an *uncanny* hole in quotidian temporality (and comprehension). (324)

As I will exemplify through Fra’s work, the two extremes demonstrate how historical and artistic artefacts can be present within different contexts and urban scales. Additionally, Sobchack’s historical perspective helps to highlight the function of time in the ontology of art, for how a latent presence might be activated at a different time, how artworks may change over time, and how historical objects can be rendered temporarily as artworks.

The first extreme, of presence as transhistorical transference, can be recognized in many things that were present in Fra’s studio, odd things like curved metal plates, frames, couches and engines. Among them was also a grille, and its typical shape, as a ‘metonymic fragment,’ made clear that what looked like scrap was actually the spare parts of the classic Citroën Traction Avant (produced between 1934-1957). Fra owned such a car, parked in the garage behind the atelier. Occasionally he started its engine, literally activating again ‘our practical, operative, and sensual engagement’ with it. But in more recent years, the car did not get out of the garage anymore, and the garage got overgrown, while the spare parts collected dust.

At a certain moment, Fra rediscovered the spare parts and used them for an art installation. They were displayed on the first floor of an old mill, which Fra and his colleagues from ‘Ag’ had turned into an exhibition space.<sup>8</sup> With the parts loosely put together, Fra created the suggestion of a Citroën, more of an analytical scheme than a real car, creating an *illusory effect*. The mill, in its turn, was similarly incomplete, missing its vanes, an object of industrial archaeology of yet another time, which became part of the installation. Once the exhibition was over, the parts were returned to the studio, dissolving the past, but resurfacing once more when Fra put some in his studio windows, creating new compositions again, as a continued employment of the artefacts and his engagement with them. When passers-by looked into the windows, Fra’s *objets trouvés* would pierce, to use Sobchack words, “an uncanny hole in quotidian temporality” (324).

In fact, Fra’s atelier itself resembled an *objet trouvé*, just like the mill, and many other buildings. In 1994, Fra with ‘Ag’ carried out a project, ironically called “Hengelo heeft niets” (“Hengelo has nothing”). They put their own monument shields on typical premises in town, including, for example, a chimney from Stork’s machine factory (when it was not yet considered monumental), remarkable shops and public buildings, and even a dilapidated shed, of which they also made a replica to exhibit in the town hall. Such monumental *objets trouvés* created a presence effect too, for their implied but elusive histories. By linking disparate buildings across the city, ‘Ag’ playfully confronted the people with Hengelo’s identity, its oblivion, and potential.

Like the window displays “re-presencing” objects (Sobchack 323) at the scale of the studio, marking buildings that were previously left unnoticed was similarly an act of “re-presencing” at the scale of the city. In both cases, a latent presence was (temporarily) activated through artistic intervention. Alternatively, Fra also made pictures of several of these objects and buildings, in which they assumed another presence, at different levels of integration.

<sup>8</sup> *Kunst Ag*, [www.kunstag.eu](http://www.kunstag.eu) Accessed 26 Feb. 2020.



## Conclusion

With my father revisiting his artworks, while the city around him was subject to change, I wondered if an image showing a city scene could be anything other than a fragment of a certain time and place. Moving beyond the question of how the particular represents the general, I have focused on how an artwork relates to its conditions of existence. I have therefore asked how an artwork's ontological relations within an urban context can be recognized as features of the artwork.

Instead of fragmentation as a generic notion, I have relied on Steward's theory of cultural ecology, with integration taking place at different levels, from the local to the global, seen from the vantage point of Hengelo and Fra's artworks. In this framework I have positioned Keunen's view on mediopolis, within the context of regional networks, and Löw's *Eigenlogik*, operating at the city level. To this I have added the individual experience, which is like a layered and patterned composition that evolves over time. In Fra's work, expressing his experience, I have observed an entanglement of times, shaping a multilinear present. Moreover, when an artwork consciously deals with time, its presence in another historical condition is not epiphenomenal, but part of its ontology.

I have followed Sobchack's notions of *presence* as transhistorical transference and *presence effect*, exemplified by (the spare parts of) Fra's Citroën. However, Sobchack's metonymic *fragment*, being an element from the past transferred to the present, may still imply a past wholeness. Sobchack's view could possibly be radicalized, to think of the historical as a *radical presence* (rooted presence). As soon as something comes into being, it is rooted in the present. But like a car, which moves, is parked, and moves again, nothing has a continuous presence. Only the present is continuous; there cannot be a singular moment in which a totality exists.

Moving from the global to the individual, I have then made a 'U-turn' through 'presence' and 'context,' arguing that higher levels of integration are created bottom-up. But the U is compromised by what an individual can ultimately grasp of higher levels. Moreover, there is neither a linear process of emerging levels, nor a progressive

development from past to present. Instead, different activities and expressions, like the creation of an artistic work, or an urban redevelopment project, have their own durations and temporal horizons, with specific *temporal coordinates plotted in space*. I have captured this emplotment at the individual level through filming Fra in his studio. As integration takes place at different levels, within corresponding environments, time might become integrated accordingly: different times (or developments with different durations) combine and make sense in different settings. Different times and spaces are interrelated, which allows for a multilinear transference of artefacts, ideas and views. This transference is also ‘warped,’ for individuals bouncing back and forth between mind and world. After all, the thinking and acting subject is not a *fragment* of the world (or the city), but an individual existing alongside any general entity.

Through my artistic research, using cinematography as a historiographical method, I have traced Fra’s envisioning and monitoring of his world. In doing so, historiography has become ontology, showing the logic of Fra’s work. I have mapped this work and through it his pathways and his environment, and by consequence, my own. Art articulates its own *presence*, in which its ontological relations can be recognized as its features. But this presence, of the artwork and the city to which it relates, is also a *presence effect*. The artwork emerges out of its environment, in which it may finally dissolve again when the context has changed. This *presence effect* is like the city’s illusory monumentality. Cities can assume different ‘states of matter’ (Keunen). They may transform and eventually disappear. In the end, both art and the city are ephemera, like walnuts being eaten. The city’s artistic rendering makes sense until disintegration takes place, through dementia. But reintegration takes place too, through transhistorical transference between generations. The emplotment of integration and transference, through experience and time, then grounds the composition of urban ontology and its artistic rendering.

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## **Biography**

Floris Paalman is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam. His interests include media historiography, the interaction between audiovisual media and urban development, film

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