

EXAMINING THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPACE IN DUCHAMP'S WORKS IN THE CONTEXT OF PERCEPTION THEORIES

Pınar KISA OVALI ^{1*}, Hatice KIRAN ÇAKIR², Recep KERKEZİ³

^{1*}Assoc. Prof. Dr. Trakya University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6230-219X

²Assoc. Prof. Dr. Trakya University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6869-5342

³Msc.Arc. Trakya University, Institute of Natural and Applied Sciences
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-6376-7009

ABSTRACT

This study examines how phenomenological philosophy expands the space-human relationship based on experience in cultural, social and psychological contexts through architecture and modern art works. The aim of the study is to evaluate the effect of phenomenological perspective on conceptual art and architecture by analyzing Marcel Duchamp's works that redefine the space-human dialectic with architectural components such as windows and doors; transforming the perception of space and objects. Perception and phenomenology of space are discussed within the scope of the theories of different thinkers in the context of 20th century space conceptualizations. The sample of the study, whose conceptual structure is developed based on the qualitative research method, consists of four works of Duchamp associated with architecture. The presence of perception theories such as Empiricism, Rationalism, Nativism and Gestalt in Duchamp's works is questioned on the basis of the phenomenological approach. As a result, it has been determined that Duchamp's architecture-related and experience-oriented works present indicators that can be explained especially by Empiricist and Gestalt theories within perception theories. In a general evaluation, it can be said that Duchamp prepared the ground for the phenomenological interpretation of architectural space with his avant-garde space studies.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Perception, Experience, Space, Marcel Duchamp

1.Introduction

Space is not only a place that meets people's physical needs for shelter; it is also a concept with which they establish emotional and physical relationships, shape their lives, and give meaning to their existence. The perception of space consists of individual experiences we experience through our senses and constructed in our minds; therefore, it varies from person to person. Architectural phenomenology aims to interpret space not solely based on rationality, but through human experience and perception. This approach advocates a holistic approach to space through sensory experiences such as light, sound, temperature, smell, and texture (Ulubay & Önal, 2020, pp. 607-608).

This study examines the perception of space and the twentieth-century conceptualization of space, drawing on the theories of various thinkers. For example, according to Heidegger, human existence is intertwined with space; existence requires being in a "place," a space. And "place" comes into being through human experience. Therefore, space is not merely a physical space, but a context within which humans establish their relationship with the world and ascribe meaning (Sharr, 2010, p. 53). Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, addresses this understanding through the concept of the body, emphasizing the central role the body plays in human perception of both the world and themselves (Danani, 2018, p. 123). Christian

Norberg-Schulz, with his concept of "genius loci," thoroughly examines the originary and historical perception of space (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p. 5). In this study the approaches developed by thinkers such as Bachelard, Pallasmaa, Lefebvre and Peres on space, body and perception were also discussed in the research and Marcel Duchamp's art was evaluated from a phenomenological perspective, presenting a new perspective on the space-human relationship and subject-object experience at the art-architecture interface.

2. Methodology

This study analyzes Duchamp's approaches that transform the perception of space and objects through four of her architecture-related and experience-oriented works, using qualitative research methods. Within the scope of the literature review, "Theories of Sensory Perception Processes" are considered, and Duchamp's works are analyzed in a tabular format, assessing the influence of the phenomenological perspective on architecture through modern art. In the analytical evaluation of Duchamp's works, symbols are utilized to consider the depictions of perceptual theories. In the paintings, the symbol "X" represents unobservable theoretical expansions and indicators, while the symbol "✓" represents observable theoretical expansions and indicators. The use of symbols in the paintings was chosen to facilitate the perception of the whole subject and to facilitate the matching of findings. In this study, which employs a descriptive analysis, the potential connection between perceptual theories and the phenomenology of the artworks is explored by establishing indicator-based relationships between these theories and the phenomenology of the artworks.

3. Phenomenological Approach to Space Perception: The Emergence of Phenomenology and Basic Ideas

"Phenomenon" is a word of Greek origin, meaning appearance/seen, or event. Phenomenology, in its literal sense, can be explained as appealing to the senses (Soygeniş, 2017, p. 99). Phenomenology aims to avoid stereotyped prejudices and philosophical dogmas by starting with a person's conscious experiences (Kartal, 2015, p. 4). Phenomenology, which argues that object knowledge can be attained through the subject, is also considered a method of analysis that questions the content of meaning that develops based on experience. This approach focuses on examining events (appearances) as they are 'directly' perceived by social actors. Phenomenology is a philosophical discipline that examines the relationships between the existing world and the world we perceive and was developed by Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century (Solak, 2017, p. 26).

The phenomenological approach emphasizes the personal and subjective nature of experience and focuses on perceived reality rather than objective reality. Accordingly, the subject attempts to describe phenomena and essences through direct and purposeless experiences, through pure perception acquired through intuition and the senses, without adhering to any judgments, assumptions, or theoretical frameworks (Tunalı, 2012, p. 70). Rather than accepting the "truths" we learn as they are, it urges us to question our presence and existence in the world. Phenomenology argues that there is no concrete, "real" world that is the same for everyone, but rather a relative structure dependent on human interpretation (Solak, 2014, p. 26), just as we experience different perceptions of the same concept due to selective attention, perceptual variables, and permanence (Erkan Yazıcı & Çakıcı Alp, 2017, pp. 58-59).

The general content of the concept of phenomenology can be summarized as follows:

- Every individual perceives the external world in their own unique way,
- An individual views the external world through their own lens,
- An individual's response to events or situations depends on their perception of reality, rather than reality itself,
- Experiences are explored through how individuals make sense of them,

- Understanding the reasons for individuals' behavior requires addressing their inner worlds,
- Individual phenomenology involves the individual's direct, subjective relationship with their environment.

E. Husserl (who is considered the founder of the theory of phenomenology) followed the trail of a deep inquiry, starting from Brentano's theory of "intentionality" and aimed to question the internal (psychological) appearance, that is, the phenomenon, beyond the concrete (physical) appearance. The intentionalities that Husserl calls acts of consciousness (perception, remembrance, liking, etc.) correspond to the perceptual realities we call "experience." In short, phenomenology enables us to make sense of phenomena by explaining how the relationship between our consciousness and phenomena is established and how we perceive them, through the acts we call experience (Ulubay & Önal, 2020, p. 607).

Martin Heidegger, one of the most important thinkers of the 20th century, aimed to explore the meaning of human existence through his existential philosophy. According to him, humans are beings who interpret and give meaning to the world (Sharr, 2013, pp. 8-9). Space is not merely a geometric extension but a lived experience. Space carries existential meaning and determines the relationship between humans and the world. Heidegger was interested in how humans perceive space and called it "Dasein" (existence). Dasein attributes meaning to space by interpreting it, and thus space itself acquires meaning. Heidegger argues that space inherently embodies openness, and that openness plays a fundamental role in humans' relationship with the world. Space enables humans to establish their connection with the world and contributes to humans' existential experience. Therefore, Heidegger's theory of space is not considered merely a physical phenomenon, but rather a concept that plays a central role in humans' existential experience (Can, 2018, p. 8).

Phenomenology, starting from the relationship between phenomena and our consciousness, pioneered radical changes in twentieth-century thought. Influenced by Brentano's comments on Aristotle's statement that "what exists is said in many different senses," Heidegger asks, "If what exists is expressed in many different senses, then what is its most fundamental meaning? What does Being mean?" (Sharr, 2013, p.7). Inspired by Aristotle, Heidegger focused on the question of "the meaning of the being of what exists," and this question formed the basis of phenomenology's inquiries into the essence (Kutgi, 2024, p. 514). Phenomenology, developed on the basis of E. Husserl's critique of knowledge, was further deepened by Martin Heidegger on existential foundations. Existential phenomenology, through which Heidegger questions existence, provides information about the "How" of a "thing," rather than the "What" it is (Can, 2018, p. 7). According to Heidegger, "The transformation of a space into a 'place' is related to its atmospheric effect shaped in the mind of the subject through perceptual awareness formed by their experiences, rather than its physical/concrete or even geometric properties". In this perspective, the concept of 'place' not only carries a physical space but also a meaning intertwined with the historical process (Can, 2018, p. 15) (Figure 1).

Although Maurice Merleau-Ponty references the works of Husserl and Heidegger, he approaches his own work through perception. Merleau-Ponty uses the concept of perception similarly to Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world, but he reads Heidegger's discourse in terms of the concept of "body" (Pallasmaa, 2016, pp. 50-51; Nane 2017, p. 42). Accordingly, the body plays a central role in perceiving the world, objects, and ourselves, and our way of being in the world is defined through the body. Merleau-Ponty defines his phenomenological approach through the concepts of perception and experience by considering the body as a whole, the unity of mind and body, rather than a concrete body (Danani, 2018, p. 123). He integrates mind and body with the "corporeality of the mind" (Nane 2017, pp. 41-42) (Figure 2).

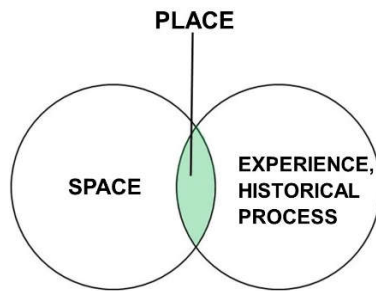


Figure 1: Heidegger's concept of "Place" (created by the authors)

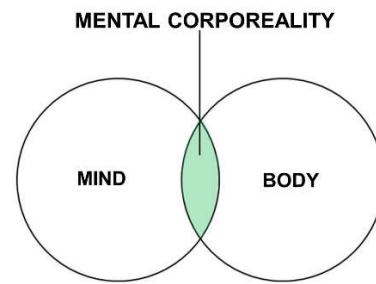


Figure 2: The concept of "Mind-Body" (created by the authors)

3.1. The Formation of Perception and the Perceptual Process According to the Phenomenological Approach

The perception of space is related to the psychology of perception, as well as the functioning of human visual perception. In the psychology of perception, "perception" is defined as the mental processing and understanding of information received from the environment through the senses (Güngör, 2005, p. 5; Asar, 2013, pp. 3-4). Lang argues that perception consists of two distinct processes, based on sensory and cognitive factors, and categorizes perception theories under the same two headings (Lang, 1987, p. 269; Uysal, 2009, p. 9; Asar, 2013, p. 8);

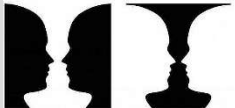
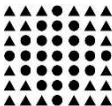
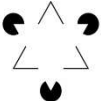
- Sensory-based theories (Rationalist, Empiricist, Nativist, and Gestalt)
- Knowledge/Information theory

We perceive information from our environment through our senses and interpret it by processing it in our minds. This cognitive process, which encompasses sensory-based, abstract factors, emerges during brief experiences when we first encounter a space or object and includes physical/physiological stimuli from spatial elements and surrounding objects, as well as all objective data (Asar, 2013, p. 9). Within this framework, theories examining the factors that define the sensory-based perception process can be classified as Rationalist, Empiricist, Nativist, and Gestalt theories (Güngör, 2005, p. 5).

According to rationalist theory, the source of knowledge is reason, and reality perceived through the senses cannot be objective. In this context, rationalists argue that reality can only be grasped through reason and logic. Empiricist theory attributes the source of knowledge to experience. The source of the relationship established with the senses is experiences perceived through the senses, and therefore, what is perceived through the senses can only be comprehended through experience. According to nativist theory, innate knowledge precedes knowledge gained through experience (Asar, 2013, pp. 9-12). Gestalt theory, on the other hand, examines human perception and perception-related cognition processes, focusing on visual perception and the visual organization of space (Wertheimer & Riezler, 1944; pp. 78-80). Gestalt theorists make definitions based on the principles of figure-ground, proximity, similarity, completion and continuity to explain "how" visual organization is created (Güngör, 2005, p.56; Graham, 2008; p. 3; Gad, 2018, pp.20-21; Yüce, 2018, p.20; Üstündağ, 2024, pp.97-98), (Table 1).

Pioneers of information theory, James and E. Gibson, view the senses as aggressive seekers rather than passive receivers (Pallasmaa, 2016, p. 52). In this theory, perception is assumed to be based on information (Güngör, 2005, p. 5), and individuals perceive the light reflected uniquely by each object. The light reflected from an object defines fundamental characteristics of the object's structure, such as color, texture, surface, and edges. Through these characteristics, individuals perceive the object and acquire information about it (Asar, 2013, p. 14). As can be seen, both sensory and information-based theories are integrated within the phenomenological approach, developing within the context of the subject's perception and interpretation of their environment. In this context, it is necessary to question the connection between phenomenology and architecture and space.

Table 1. Gestalt theory principles (compiled from Güngör, 2005; Gad, 2028; Yüce, 2018)

GESTALT THEORY PRINCIPLES		
Figure-Ground		(Rubin's vase)
Proximity		
Similarity		
Closure		(Kanizsa triangle)
Continuity		

3.2. Phenomenology of Space and the Concept of Place

The discipline of architecture, also known as the art of spatial organization and grounded in scientific methods of making space meaningful, exists through the embodiment of abstract mental processes (design) into concrete artifacts (buildings-spaces). Consequently, architectural design guides human experiences and perceptions in shaping human living spaces. Therefore, there is an undeniably close relationship between phenomenology and architecture.

Phenomenology of architectural space views architectural spaces as time-bound phenomena and examines their relationship with human perception and experience (Aydın, 2002, p. 42). This discipline explores the effects of architectural spaces on human senses, mind, and body, the meaning and symbolism of architectural spaces, and how architectural spaces are experienced across time and space from a holistic perspective. Phenomenology of architectural space examines any architectural structure not only from its external characteristics but also from the perspective of human senses and experiences (Can, 2018, p. 88). In the phenomenological approach, buildings or spaces are examined within the scope of the concrete physical components that shape the size, lighting, material or general structure of the volume, and the human senses and perceptions that are formed under the influence of these. The aim is to understand how people experience architectural spaces, to help them design more meaningful and effective spaces based on the perceptual dimensions of architecture, and to encourage them to incorporate human experiences into their designs. This, in a sense, helps designers construct the sensory and semantic structures of people's living conditions.

Architectural phenomenology began in the 1940s, when phenomenological philosophers emphasized themes implicit in architecture. By the 1950s, architects began to engage directly with phenomenology (Seamon, 2023, p. 220). From the mid-20th century onward, it was explored by figures such as C. Norberg-Schulz, J. Pallasmaa, S. Holl, P. Zumthor, and Alberto P. Gómez. Using the phenomenological approach, these architects sought to understand how people respond to space, what they feel in it, and how they find meaning in it. Drawing inspiration from Heidegger's existentialist ideas and examining the historical and originary perception of space through the concept of "Genius Loci" within the framework of the concept of experience, Norberg-Schulz examined the semantics of the 20th-century concept of space (Aydın, 2002, p. 46).

Genius loci refers to the quest to perceive the atmospheric spirit of space, rather than its physical conception. According to Genius Loci (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, pp. 25-30):

- Place cannot be considered separately from the dimension of life.
- Place is the level of space that reflects life.
- Every being has its own unique "essence".
- The phenomenon that nourishes existence with its character is "essence".
- Essence transforms space into "place".
- When space is abstracted from the components of its geography, that is, when it is detached from its context, it becomes a void. (Figure 3).

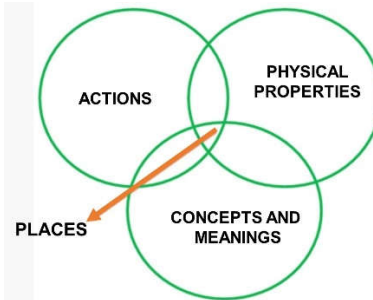


Figure 3: Concepts and relationships that constitute "Place" (developed from Kahvecioğlu, 1998)

The meaning of "place" is shaped not only by what we see, but also by what we think, imagine, and remember. The images we encounter during our journey shape all our experiences and contribute to our spatial impression. According to Norberg-Schulz, "place" is concretely related to the environment and abstractly related to meaning (Nane 2017, p. 52; Ulubay & Önal, 2020, p. 609).

J. Pallasmaa evaluates the phenomenology of space from the perspective of awareness. He strips architectural design of its sculptural narrative—that is, pure form—and emphasizes understanding its essence, where perception and senses are at the forefront of understanding architecture. In a sense, Pallasmaa attempts to access the concept of experience by interpreting architectural components (doors, windows, walls, etc.) through actions in order to make sense of space (Pallasmaa, 2016, p. 77). Instead of formally expressing architectural components, Pallasmaa sought answers to questions about how experiencing that component and the action at the core of its existence would feel (Pallasmaa, 2016, p. 80). In this context, the phenomenology of space can be thought of as reading architecture through actions and constructing actions in design. From Pallasmaa's perspective, in the communication between the ready-made objects in this study and the subject:

- DOOR.....turns into the act of entering,
- WINDOW.....turns into the act of looking.

Architect Peter Zumthor discusses the factors that create the atmosphere of a space and the feeling it gives under nine headings within human-space communication (architectural body, material harmony, sound in space, thermal comfort, surrounding object universe, serenity and attraction interface, interior-exterior tension, stages of intimacy, light). In his book "Atmosphere," he explores the diversity of sensory experiences created by the combination of these factors (Zumthor, 2006, pp. 20-56). According to Bilgin (2016, p. 21), Zumthor's craftsmanship (a carpenter and architect) and his intellectual nature living in a village paved the way for him to appeal to the senses through building materials, that is, matter.

In his book "The Poetics of Space," Bachelard emphasizes that space is not merely a physical entity but also a force that influences and shapes people's inner worlds. He examines the home and the relationship between individuals and it from a phenomenological perspective. He uses the home as a tool for analyzing the human psyche (Bachelard, 1996, p. 15) and evaluates this within the framework of the concept of experience. According to him (1996, pp. 69-103), "A house lived in or in the process of being lived in transcends the geometric. A house

is not a place, but a feeling". From this perspective, instead of basing his phenomenological perspective on the senses, he looks to memory; memories of the past, nostalgia.

Henri Lefebvre defines space and spatial perception through the body. In his book "The Production of Space", he grounds the concepts of "perceived-desired-lived space" in bodily experience and emphasizes that space is produced through experience. Accordingly, in experienced space, there is a communication between people and space, and this communication is both influenced by and influenced by the period in which the individual lives (Lefebvre, 2014, pp. 68-69).

In his book "Espaces/Mekan Feşmekân", Georges Perec examines how space is shaped, delimited, and acquires meaning in stages (from the specific to the general, from the micro to the macro). His aim is not to focus on the historical transformation of space; on the contrary, it is to read space and clarify its ambiguous parts. In doing so, he examines how space is given meaning and filled with its content, starting from the smallest piece of space or void (Perec, 2020, pp. 11-19). He reflects on the interaction between vital/narrative data and space (uselessness, ordinariness, the habitable, the livable; windows, dimensions, boundaries) and asks questions about the interaction with memory. Perec's effort to explore the internal and personal meanings of space finds meaning in these questions (Perec, 2020, pp. 43-44);

- What does it mean to inhabit a room?
- Why or at what point does a place become ours?
- If we move the bed/furniture in a room/space, do we change the room?"

As can be seen, although renowned architects and thinkers approach the phenomenology of space within the framework of different assumptions and factors, the following commonalities are evident from a phenomenological perspective;

- Space cannot exist independently of the subject, their body, and their sensations.
- The phenomenologic perspective is an approach dominated by spatial experience and it considers sensory experience as a whole (light, texture, sound, temperature, smell).
- The individual establishes a connection with the space they experience through their senses (touch, smell, sight, hearing).

The discipline of architecture, due to its technical and aesthetic aspects, has developed in close relationships with many branches of science and art. Recently, avant-garde art, particularly centered on human experience, offers a scope and diversity worthy of examination in terms of spatial phenomenology. This study examines the traces of spatial phenomenology in the works of avant-garde artist Marcel Duchamp within the context of sensory-based perception theories through examples of the artist's personal art.

4. The Evolution of Duchamp's Art and the Phenomenology of His Works (The Perception/Meaning of Emptiness)

Born in 1887 in the town of Blainville, Normandy, France, Marcel Duchamp grew up in a family devoted to art (his mother was a landscape painter who admired Monet). This family environment, steeped in art, influenced not only Duchamp but also his siblings' inclinations towards art (as cited in Yıldız, 2016, p. 135). Duchamp, who studied painting at the Julian Academy (Paris), shifted his art from Impressionism to Cubism under the influence of Paul Cézanne's works (Cubism) (Kalkan Erenus, 2012, p. 4). It is observed that he turned to Dadaism and Futurism after meeting the renowned Dadaist Francis Picabia (Altınyıldız Artun & Artun, 2018, p. 110).

The Dada movement, which emerged during World War II, was influenced by a philosophy driven by despair at the devastation of the world. Dadaist artists aimed to question the social and cultural order by incorporating randomness and improvisation into the artistic process. Therefore, Dadaists rejected traditional artistic methods (Altınyıldız Artun & Artun, 2018, pp. 21-37). Picabia was a significant turning point in Duchamp's life. In 1912, he, along

with Picabia and Apollinaire, adapted R. Roussel's "African Impressions" for the stage. Deeply influenced by Roussel's writing style and wordplay, Duchamp said, "As a painter, it felt better to be influenced by one writer than another," and moved away from figurative art and reshaped his works with avant-garde ideas (Yıldız, 2016, p. 136) (Table 2). Duchamp, who immigrated to New York in 1915, became a pioneer of 20th-century conceptual art, or avant-garde art, with his ready-made works (Tunalı, 2012, p. 72; Özabaş & Çeliksap, 2025, p. 74), reaching the pinnacle of his art. Experiencing the second turning point in his artistic evolution, the artist rejected the traditional understanding of painting, which he called "retinal art," focusing on the question, "What is art?" (Yıldız, 2016, p. 137). The abstract dialectic of Naturalism, which began with ready-mades, gradually shifted towards artificial reality and installation (Tunalı, 2012, p. 51).

Table 2. The evolution of Marcel Duchamp’s art and related works (compiled from Istanbul Sanat Evi, 2025)

Art movements	Works	Art movements	Works	Art movements	Works
Impressionism (Landscape at Blainville-1902)		Fauvism (Landscape-1911)		Futurism (Nude Descendi-1912)	
Post-Impressionism (The Chess Game-1910)		Cubism (Portrait of Chess Players-1911)		Conceptual Art (Fountain-1917)	

Among the ready-mades he created during this period, the most resounding work was "Fountain" (Table 2) from 1917. Aiming to overthrow traditional artistic methods, Duchamp argued that art should once again be transformed into a service to the mind. The intellectual foundations of conceptual art, which emerged in the 1960s, are based on Duchamp's concept of ready-mades (1910s) and his work "Fountain" (Kalkan Erenus, 2012, p. 133; Tunalı, 2012, p. 72). Duchamp, who turned the porcelain urinal he bought from the "Mott Works" store in New York upside down and signed it with the pseudonym "R. Mutt", sent this functionally focused ready-made object under the name "Fountain" to the "Independent Artists Society Exhibition" and questioned the criteria and critics' expectations for an object to be accepted as a work of art (Kalkan Erenus, 2012, p. 98). This action brought innovation to the art world by changing the fundamental elements that constitute a work of art, highlighting that art is an understanding shaped by the artist's purpose rather than a skill (Kalkan Erenus, 2012, p. 100).

It is no longer important whether R. Mutt himself made this ready-made object (fountain) or whether he participated in its production process, because by choosing it, Duchamp eliminated its functional meaning with a new name and perspective. By detaching the object from its physical environment and known function, redefining it with a name that is completely contrary to its meaning, and in a sense transforming it, he has performed an act of "creating thought" (Kalkan Erenus, 2012, p. 101). Duchamp, who questioned the conventional perception of art by taking his art beyond retinal perception and at the same time made the viewer question the concept of space and opened the discussion to the meaning that space attributed to objects, laid the foundations of conceptual art (Kalkan Erenus, 2012, p. 101). The phenomenological perspective on modern art was shaped by the Avant-Garde movements of the early 20th century, which can be considered the pinnacle of modern art. Many artists, such as Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian, and other representatives of the De Stijl movement, who rejected figurative art and embraced abstract art, embraced this movement. However, Marcel Duchamp, unlike these avant-garde artists, went beyond the abstraction of a picture and

incorporated experience into his art, presenting his works not through pure sensory perception but through a holistic understanding of space that physically immerses the viewer. Therefore, Duchamp's art makes the viewer a part of that space both sensorily and physically.

4.1. Phenomenology of Space in Duchamp's Works

Architectural phenomenology and avant-garde art are disciplines that share similar characteristics during the modernist process. Architectural phenomenology is an approach that focuses on the subjectivity of architectural experience. According to this approach, how architectural spaces are perceived and experienced by people is important. Similarly, avant-garde art centers on human experience, questioning ordinary perceptions and shattering traditional understandings of art to create a new aesthetic. The relationship between avant-garde art and architectural phenomenology is that both disciplines center on human experience and aim to redefine and reshape human experience. While avant-garde art challenges traditional understandings of art and aims to create a new aesthetic, architectural phenomenology questions modern architectural understandings and aims to create a new architectural experience.

Two different "Surrealist Artists' Exhibitions" held in the first half of the 20th century virtually invaded the senses, drawing attention to senses beyond retinal perception. These exhibitions, particularly with Duchamp's works, paved the way for post-modern architecture; by making the emotional impact of space felt through the body experiencing it, they created a counter-modernist phenomenon (Altinyıldız Artun, 2020, p. 303). The first example of Duchamp manipulating the perception of the subject experiencing space is his installation "1200 Coal Bags" (Figure 4), designed for the "International Surrealism Exhibition" held at the Gallery of Fine Arts in Paris in 1938. This work shows how an ordinary object gains an extraordinary meaning in a spatial context by completely transforming the physical perception of space (Kalkan Erenus, 2012, p. 120).

1200 coal bags suspended from the ceiling over a stove is an unusual arrangement that disrupts existing methods of exhibition in terms of spatiality. Using the ceiling (overhead plane) as the display space, rather than vertical structural elements (walls) or the floor plane, was a groundbreaking method for its time. By "inverting" the architectural space, the floor becomes the ceiling, and the ceiling becomes the floor. The small stove beneath the coal bags is intended to be perceived by the viewer as a chandelier. This arrangement, with its inverted gallery, challenges and provokes the viewer's conventional perception of space. Duchamp even requested that two revolving doors, used for entrance and exit to the room, be placed on either side of the stove to create a chaotic interplay between interior and exterior. The graphic works on display are hung on the four surfaces of these revolving doors, confusing the viewer and deliberately interfering with their perception (Kalkan Erenus, 2012, p. 120). Ultimately, in his installation "1200 Coals," Duchamp created constructs by considering the relationship between space and object, making the viewer the subject of the construct. As an installation grounded in the viewer's experience, this work is an artwork that both feeds off of and nourishes the space.

Duchamp's work "16 Miles of String" was featured in the 1942 exhibition "New York: Reference Documents for Surrealism" (Figure 5). In this installation, Duchamp envelops the entire gallery and other artists' works in a web of strings. These webs of string make movement, entry, and exit within the space difficult. O'Doherty points out that Duchamp's installation makes the space tangible: Schultz stated that it transforms the feeling of "place" into a space that blocks it (as cited in Kalkan Erenus, 2012, pp. 122-123). With his installation in the exhibition space, Duchamp used the other works in the exhibition as the backdrop for his own work, reducing the exhibition to his own. The ropes, which surrounded the space from every angle without any order or structure, transformed the space. This was because Duchamp intentionally obstructed access to the displayed object images and emphasized the inescapable connection between the viewer and the object. Instead of placing subject and object in direct

relation, he obstructed the viewer through the ropes, placing space between the subject and the object. Thus, the void is first perceived sensorily and then mentally. With this work, Duchamp positions space between subject and object; he defines and concretizes emptiness through strings. Made real by the strings, the void is now perceived concretely. The subject-object dialectic is transformed overall. As a result, subject, space, and object become intertwined.

Before his aforementioned Surrealist exhibitions, Marcel Duchamp produced various conceptual art objects using architectural elements in the 1920s and presented them in various exhibitions. For example, in 1920, he exhibited a French-style window, a building component, as a "ready-made" within the framework of his own critical perspective (dedicated to the widows of World War I – National Gallery of Art, 2025) (Figure 6). Organized within a spatial space for purposes of opening to the outside, defining the direction of vision, and providing light and ventilation, the window generally exists within and as a component of vertical structural elements. Its function also defines the boundary between interior and exterior spaces. However, Duchamp's French Window is a window whose glass is covered with leather, its permeability is denied, and its functionality is deliberately eliminated, altering its essence. This transformed window, while simultaneously depicting the darkness of its space, renders the transparency/permeability of the glass dysfunctional. This situation also opens up the issue of "closed openness" through the opposition of "visible/invisible" (Kalkan Erenus, 2012, p. 105). After Duchamp's intervention, the window, a tool for opening onto the exterior, became the subject itself. It no longer served as a structural component mediating the act of looking, but rather as the very thing we were looking at. The window was now both subject and object.



Figure 4: 1200 coal bags suspended from the ceiling over a stove - 1938 - Paris (International Surrealism Exhibition) (re-arranged using Kalkan Erenus, 2012, p.121)



Figure 5: 16 miles of string, New York re-arranged using Kalkan Erenus, 2012, p.122)



Figure 6: "French window\Fresh widow" (rearranged using the National Gallery of Art, 2025)

Ultimately, we cannot fully grasp the reality of what we visually perceive without experiencing it. As Siegert (2015, p. 112) points out, we are actually perceiving emptiness, a plane materialized and reflected through the window. Therefore, it is impossible to speak of experiencing space without being present within the space. This dialectic between human beings and space expresses a phenomenological existence based on the subject-object relationship, much like Marcel Duchamp's "Rue 11" created in 1927.

Duchamp designed Rue 11 for his own apartment in Paris, blurring the effect of limitation by creating a sequence within the object's fundamental function. A door, hinged on a sill shared by two perpendicular openings, serves two thresholds (and three spaces) simultaneously (Figure 7). Beyond its purely artistic significance, it is also functional. By questioning the mere opening or closing of a door (while also reinterpreting its familiar and familiar primary function by gaining space in a narrow space) (Siegert, 2015, p. 134), Duchamp altered the boundaries of spaces. Through an act of destruction, he actually creates a phenomenon. Despite destroying a concrete phenomenon, the door's purpose in existence remains. In other words, what disappears is merely a door; its function still persists. A door that closes while opening or opens while closing also presents a paradoxical action. It is simultaneously open and closed. As a simple structural component, the door achieves the

ultimate in its function, maintaining movement in an endless cycle (Figure 8). Therefore, the simple object is placed at the center of the home, both functionally and semantically.

Here, Duchamp did not abandon the familiar door and frame; on the contrary, he reintroduced the object, but challenged the standard known through the sequence he created. Through the door's location and operating method, he disrupted the individual's perception of space by confusing the inside and outside, which are characterized by the subject's position within the space. When one space opens, the other automatically closes. Duchamp's paradoxical door is thus always simultaneously open and closed (Siegert, 2015, p. 45). By transforming the object into the door phenomenon, the door transforms, in a sense, altering the meaning and use of architectural space. Rejecting the singular use of the object and focusing on experience and the change and transformation that comes with it, Marcel Duchamp's approach has undoubtedly influenced architecture.



Figure 7: Marcel Duchamp "Rue 11," Paris, 1927 (rearranged from Duchamp Research Portal, 2025)

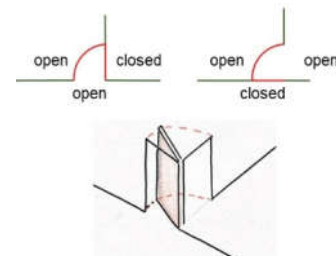


Figure 8: Plan sketch of "Rue 11" (adapted from Siegert 2015) and perspective on its working principle (drawn by the authors)

5. Findings

Marcel Duchamp's works, particularly those related to conceptual art, offer qualities that can be considered within the scope of architectural theories, with their constructions focused on perception and experience. Fundamental theories addressing the sensory-based perception process, which plays a significant role in the phenomenology of space, can be instructive in analyzing four of Duchamp's works that appear to be directly related to the phenomenology of architectural space (Table 3). In this context, Duchamp's artistic practice was found to be closely related to Empiricist and Gestalt theories. Based on the works examined, Nativist and Rationalist theories were not found to be relevant due to their lack of effective signification in their construction and presentation.

According to Empiricist Theory, the source of knowledge is experience, and knowledge derives from experiences perceived through the senses. An experience-oriented approach is evident in all four of Duchamp's analyzed works. Shaped by sensory perceptions, these works seek to define an art object not merely as a visible form but through its relationship with human experience and the senses. At the same time, Empiricism, in Duchamp's art, supports the understanding that knowledge can be acquired solely through experience, questioning sensory responses and individuals' subjective perceptions, demonstrating the artist's experience-oriented perspective. In all four of Duchamp's works, the viewer/subject does not establish a direct relationship with the object/object; rather, the role of perception and experience in the process is paramount.

Gestalt theory is another important approach to understanding Duchamp's works. This theory considers visual perception as a whole, suggesting that individuals perceive the world around them holistically rather than in parts (O'Connor, 2015, p. 87). The meaning of the whole is more than the meaning of individual parts. It argues that individuals perceive objects or events as a whole, not as simple parts, and that this visual perception is a constantly changing and evolving process within the subject-object-space triangle. This holistic connection between space, perception, and visual organization is also prominent in Duchamp's works. It has been

determined that Gestalt's organizing principles are differentially dominant in each work (Table 3). For example, in the phenomenology of the " sequential door paradox " identified for the work "Rue 11": the cycle of always being both open and closed overlaps with the Gestalt principle of continuity. The principle of continuity is defined as the perception of elements arranged in the same straight line or a smooth curve as a group and their interpretation as more related than elements that are not on the line or curve (Gad, 2018, p. 26; Yüce, 2018, p. 20). Even if a pattern or formation with good continuity ends, it can create the impression in the viewer that it is not over but continues (Gad, 2018, p. 25; Üstündağ, 2024, p. 97). Continuity applies not only to time-based experiences, where we try to understand patterns in space but also in time, and events that are closer to each other in time are more likely to be perceived as related and continuous (Graham, 2008, p. 10). The sequential door is continuous at this point.

Table 3. Analysis of phenomenological perception in Duchamp's space-related experience-oriented works

Work title and image		Rue 11	Coal Bag	16 Miles String	French Window
Phenomenological perception definition of the work					
Phenomenological explanation of the work		SEQUENTIAL DOOR PARADOX The paradoxical door is always open and closed at the same time, presenting an endless loop.	TURNING THE SPACE UPSIDE DOWN By turning the space upside down, the ceiling becomes the floor and the floor becomes the ceiling.	DEFINING THE GAP With strings, space is placed between subject and object. The quality of the void changes, it becomes concrete.	SUBJECT-WINDOW PARADOX Covering the window panes with an opaque surface destroys the purpose of the object's existence. The paradox of closed openness develops.
Sensory-based theories of perception	Gestalt	✓ CONTINUITY	✓ SIMILARITY and PROXIMITY	✓ FIGURE-GROUND	✓ CLOSURE
	Nativist	X	X	X	X
	Empiricist	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Rationalist	X	X	X	X

The phenomenology of " turning the space upside down " described for the "1200 Coal Bags" installation can be explained by the Gestalt principles of similarity and proximity. According to the principle of similarity, objects that exhibit common visual qualities such as shape, size, color, and texture are grouped within the scope of perceptual unity, creating a similarity effect. The principle of proximity also involves the perception of elements and objects that are close to each other in relation to each other. Forms that approach each other are perceived as grouped, much like a whole or a surface (Güngör, 2005, p. 13; Üstündağ, 2024, p. 98). Architecturally, the ceiling and floor are two planes that delimit and define the space. In Duchamp's work, the suspended position of numerous coal bags in space is perceived as an artificial interface through the formation of unity based on repetition. Through the effect of similarity, a second surface/new plane is defined beneath the space's main ceiling, inverting the individual's perceptions.

For the work "16 Miles of String" the phenomenology of " defining the gap" offers a figure-ground narrative. According to this principle, which forms the basis of Gestalt theory of perception, strong energy groups within a composition or setting (the areas toward which an individual's attention is directed) create a shape/form effect, while weaker energy groups (the arrangements located behind the form) are perceived as ground (Güngör, 2005, p. 6; Graham, 2008, p. 3; Gad, 2018, p. 24; Yüce, 2018, p. 20). By covering the space and works by other

artists exhibited in the exhibition space with rope, the artist used these other works as the ground for his own work. In a sense, he reduced the exhibition to his own work and shaped the pattern he created with the ropes, his work, as a high-energy field. The abstract void defining the space ceased to be ground and revealed its own existence as concrete form. With this work, Duchamp created a powerful figure-ground illusion.

The last work examined, the "French window", was seen to be related to the Gestalt principle of closure within the scope of the "Subject window paradox". According to the principle of closure, our minds tend to create a whole by completing incomplete forms (Gad, 2018, p. 27; Asif & Burton, 2021, p. 585), and for the mind to complete what is missing, it must have a place in the subject's past teachings. In other words, it is important that it be known in advance (Graham, 2008, p. 7). Duchamp's ready-made object, the window, is a well-known structural component with its transparent structure that mediates the act of looking, its ability to reveal what is behind (the expected basic function), and its functions as an airflow opening. However, Duchamp paradoxically alters this familiar object and its function, transforming the object used for looking into the object being looked at, and even into the subject through its contextual attribution. At this point, the implicit window, which remains incomplete, is presented in the mind to be completed. When the implicit opening is questioned, a completion is made at an abstract level in the cognitive process.

6. Conclusion

Phenomenological philosophy, by expanding the 20th-century understanding of space within the framework of trends such as culture, society, psychology, and the city, has brought into question the limitations of the rational concept of space based on concrete criteria. In the phenomenology of space, the subject is the primary actor experiencing space, and therefore, space should not be designed based on ideas that exclude the senses by focusing on pure rationality, but should be approached within the axis of subjectivity and experience, prioritizing perception and the senses. Within this context, describing the "essence" that defines space, that is, the phenomena, is crucial. From this perspective, when considered specifically within the discipline of architecture, phenomenology can be seen as a method that questions the meaning of architectural formation/form/space within the framework of the human-space dialectic.

Duchamp's works under study were analyzed within the scope of sensory-based theories of perception processes. These experience-focused works, along with Empiricist and Gestalt Theories, offer indicators that are detached from subjective perspectives, can be explained through drawings, and whose presence can be clearly seen in visuals. Knowledge grasped through experience is the fundamental assumption of Empiricist theory, and Duchamp's works present a thoroughly empiricist perspective. While the principles of visual perception within Gestalt theory, rooted in psychology, necessitate more detailed indicators for perception and meaning, the dominance of a different principle was identified for each work examined in this study. It is evident that Duchamp employed (consciously or unconsciously) the principles of visual perception theory, which holds a significant place in the discipline of architecture, in his works. In the context of empiricist and Gestalt theories, these four works not only explain how knowledge is generated through the senses but also question how individuals make sense of their surroundings, offering a profound layer of experience and meaning beyond what is merely visible. In this context, the subject (viewer) and the object (artwork) are central to Duchamp's works. Space is an integral part, even complementary, of this network of relationships. Duchamp conceived of space not simply as a place or physical space, but as a phenomenon that interacts with the viewer and is constantly redefined. In fact, in a phenomenological reading, it can be said that this experiential process redefines itself in a continuous flow and cycle.

In this context, Duchamp created constructs that considered the relationship between space and object, enabling the viewer to inhabit these constructs. The artist possesses a profound

understanding of space and the architectural elements that enable us to interpret it. Consequently, the connection between people and space emerges in his works as a phenomenological reality within the context of the subject-object relationship. Duchamp, who contemplated, discoursed, and produced works based on phenomenology, made architectural space felt by the experiencing body. Acting experience-focused, without formal or aesthetic concerns and without reference to any architectural order, Duchamp saw architectural space beyond the act of building and engaged in intellectual inquiry. Therefore, Duchamp's phenomenologically rooted, experience-focused, and perception-oriented works exist at the interface of architecture and philosophy. Duchamp aimed to explore what lies beyond the visible, expressing all his thoughts in this direction. He maintained his originality by keeping his boundaries flexible, and created his own reality and offered it for discussion. He engaged with architecture in his individual art to transform what exists and imbue it with new meanings—a fact the authors believe was deliberate. The analysis method presented in this study from an architectural perspective can be applied to the artist's other works within the context of other theories (e.g., knowledge-based). It is envisaged that different studies can be developed that will critically examine many of Duchamp's works that cannot be directly associated with architecture and space, that belong to the early years of his artistic development, or that are based solely on object interpretations (such as fountains, bicycles, etc.).

Marcel Duchamp revolutionized 20th-century modern art by bringing retinal perception to the mental and experiential process. His interpretations of ready-made objects and his exhibition choices laid the foundations for avant-garde works and conceptual art. It can be argued that his works, particularly those in which he interpreted space and its components, laid the groundwork for a phenomenological interpretation of architectural space. Of course, this discourse, within the limitations of this study, is only addressed within the scope of his works that engage with the space-human dialectic. Consequently, the study opens up the following questions related to the discipline of architecture within the context of Marcel Duchamp's exhibitions and works:

- Could the artist have unknowingly reached the extremes of experiencing a space with all senses through his works?
- Could the artist have unknowingly or knowingly pioneered an architectural phenomenon?

References

- Altınyıldız Artun, N. & Artun, A. (2018). Dada Kılavuz 1913-1923: Münih, Zürih, Berlin, Paris. İletişim Publishing.
- Altınyıldız Artun, N. (2020). Sürrealizm/Mimarlık Mekân Sanatı. İletişim Publishing.
- Asar, H. (2013). Mimari Mekân Okumasında Algısal Deneyim Analizinin Bir Yöntem Yardımıyla İrdelenmesi. Unpublished Thesis (MSc.), Eskişehir Osmangazi University.
- Asif, A. & Burton, O. (2021). Comic Sans or Common Sense? Graphic Design for Clinical Teachers. *The Clinical Teacher*, 18(6), p.583-589.
- Aydınlı, S. (2002), Epistemolojik Açısından Mekân Yorumu, A. Şentürer, Ş. Ural, A. Atasoy (Ed) in *Mimarlık ve Felsefe* (s. 40-51). YEM Publishing.
- Bachelard, G. (1996). *Mekânın Poetikası* (A. Tümeetekin, Tr.). Kesit Publishing.
- Bilgin, İ. (2016). *Mimarın Soluğu: Peter Zumthor Mimarlığı Üzerine Denemeler*. Metis Publishing.
- Can, İ. (2018). Mimarlıkta 'Yer' Kavramı Üzerine Fenomenolojik Bir Değerlendirme: ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Örneği. Unpublished Thesis (MSc.), Eskişehir Osmangazi University.
- Danani, C. (2018). Phenomenological Ways for Rethinking Architecture, *Serbian Architectural Journal SAJ*, 10(3):119-130.
- Duchamp Research Portal (2025, 2 June). Photograph of The Door in The 11, Rue Larrey Apartment, Paris. https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE_B020_F001_018/
- Erkan Yazıcı, Y. & Çakıcı Alp, N. (2017). Duyuların Mekânsal Deneyimleri Şekillendirmesi: Sagrada Familia Kilisesi, *Art-e Suleyman Demirel University, Faculty of Fine Arts*, 10 (19), 55-77.
- Gad, D. (2018). Information Design of Public Documents: Applying Gestalt Principles to Improve User Understanding, Thesis (MSc.), University of Laval, Canada]. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.16097.35681

- Graham, L. (2008). Gestalt Theory in Interactive Media Design. *Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 2(1), 1-12. <https://www.guillaumegronier.com/2024-psychologiegenerale/resources/articles/Graham2008.pdf>
- Güngör, İ. H. (2005). Görsel Sanatlar ve Mimarlık İçin Temel Tasar. Esen Ofset.
- İstanbul Sanat Evi. (2025, 27 January) Marcel Duchamp. <https://www.istanbulsanatevi.com/category/sanaticilar/soyadi-d/duchamp-marcel/>
- Kahvecioğlu, H. (1998). Mimarlıkta İmaj: Mekânsal İmajın Oluşumu ve Yapısı Üzerine Bir Model, Unpublished Thesis (PhD), İstanbul Teknik University.
- Kalkan Erenus, T. (2012). Marcel Duchamp'ın Yapıtlarına Çözümleyici Bir Katalog Çalışması. Unpublished Thesis (MSc.), Işık University.
- Kartal, A. N. (2015). Üç [Parantez] Bir Anlatı: Ucu Açık Fenomenolojik Bir Deşifre. Unpublished Thesis (MSc.), İstanbul Teknik University.
- Kutgi, H. (2024). Aristoteles ve Heidegger'de Theoria Perspektifinden Varlık. *Kaygı*. Bursa Uludağ University Faculty of Arts and Sciences *Journal of Philosophy*, 23 (2), 511-536.
- Lang, J. (1987). *Creating Architectural Theory: The Role of Behavioral Sciences in Enviromental Design*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company.
- Lefebvre, H. (2014). *Mekânın Üretimi*. (I. Ergüden, Tr.). Sel Publishing.
- Nane, P. (2017). İnşanın Poetikasından Poetikanın İnşasına Meclis Cami Üzerinden Mekânda Poetikliğin İzini Sürmek. Unpublished Thesis (MSc.), Hacettepe University.
- National Art Galery, Washington DC-USA. (2025, 28 May). <https://www.nga.gov/artworks/140327-fresh-widow>
- Norberg-Schulz, C. (1980). *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. New York, NY: Rizzoli.
- O'Connor, Z. (2015). Colour, Contrast and Gestalt Theories of Perception: The Impact in Contemporary Visual Communications Design, *Color Research & Application*, 40 (1), 85-92.
- Özbaş, İ., & Çeliksap, S. (2025). Kavramsal Sanat ve Fotoğrafta Estetik. *Art Vision*, 31(54), 71-81.
- Pallasmaa, J. (2016). *Tenin Gözleri: Mimarlık ve Duyular*. (A. U. Kılıç, Tr.). İstanbul. YEM Publishing.
- Perec, G. (2020). *Mekân Feşmekan*. (A. Erkay, Tr.). Everest Publishing.
- Seamon, D. (2023). *Architecture and Phenomenology* (Chapter 16), (In *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Architectural History*; D. Lu, Eds.). New York, NY: Routledge. (pp. 218-229). DOI: 10.4324/9781315674469-18
- Sharr, A. (2010). *Mimarlar İçin Heidegger*, (V. Atmaca, Tr.). YEM Publishing.
- Siegert, B. (2015). *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of The Real*. Fordham University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt14jxrmf>
- Solak, S. (2017). Mekân-Kimlik Etkileşimi: Kavramsal ve Kuramsal Bir Bakış. *MANAS Journal of Social Studies*, 6(1), 13-37.
- Soygeniş, S. (2017). *Mimarlık Düşünmek Düşlemek*. YEM Publishing.
- Ulubay, S. & Önal, F. (2020). Mekân Üzerine Sorunsallar ve Kavrayışlar: Fenomenoloji Kuramının Yirminci Yüzyılın Mekân Anlayışına Etkileri. *Megaron* 15(4), 606-613.
- Uysal, M. A. (2009). *Sanatta Mekân Algısı (Mekanla Oynamak)*. Unpublished Thesis (PhD), Hacettepe University.
- Üstündağ, E.N. (2024). Gestalt İlkeleri Perspektifinden Pareidolia Temalı Afiş Tasarımlarının Değerlendirilmesi. *Art-e Suleyman Demirel University, Faculty of Fine Arts*, 17(33), 90-110.
- Yıldız, B. (2016). Marcel Duchamp Eserlerinin Yıkıcı Düzlemi ve Readymade'lerindeki Anti-Topografi; *Art-Sanat* 6/2016, 133-146.
- Yüce, O. (2018). *Görsel Algı ve Tasarım Kriterlerinin Mekân Olgusuna Etkisi*, Unpublished Thesis (MSc.), Mimar Sinan University.
- Wertheimer, M. & Riezler, K. (1944). *Gestalt Theory*, *Social Research*, 11(1), 78-99.
- Zumthor, P. (2006). *Atmospheres: Architectural Environments, Surrounding Objects*. Birkhäuser.