



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# PHENOMENOLOGY IN PHOTOGRAPHY: LE CORBUSIER'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPRESSION

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### ABSTRACT

Different art practices, the interpretation and understanding of the concept of art, different mediums and artists' forms/contents of objects can be compared. In this comparison, the relationship between aesthetic sensation and the subject perceiving the art object can be examined. In this regard, it is possible to examine it in the phenomenological philosophy of perception, in aesthetic perception, in the context of perceiving-receptive phenomena and perception. The purpose of this article is to examine these comments through photography and to provide a perspective on the effects of photography on architecture. It was carried out through literature review, which is one of the qualitative research methods. Hence, within the scope of the study, 4 examples are discussed on how images no longer remain only two-dimensional static and only visible structures, and the transformation of images into interactive structures with digitalization and the processes of responding to different movements of the human body. In the conclusion, Le Corbusier's approach to phenomenology is examined by taking a closer look at his interior photographs and how he manipulated them.

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## INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology is defined as "a method for determining what is important." The phenomenological position is based on the analysis of our direct sensory perceptions and observations and the intellectual reflection of these processes. The changing object with the concept of phenomenological perception and its definition can be suggested in terms of presenting a new field of both theoretical and applied research that emphasizes the break of contemporary art in traditional language, phenomenological reduction, intentionality and the importance of the process of current and life-related objects and events within the scope of art. The results arising from the diversity of mediums in contemporary art and objects lead to new views and changes in the content of definitions or discussions regarding the concepts of objects. From the phenomenological point of view, the suggestion or expression itself becomes the object for the artist and his object, that is, it seems that the art becomes a goal rather than an instrumentality for the viewer/receiver as well as its performance. Also, the dominance of vision over the other senses of our body has increased from the past to the present, and has emerged as a structure that gradually disrupts individual perception processes.

Especially in modern times, those who argue that images are perceived only in the mind argue that vision occurs as an act independent of the body. However, digitalization has reversed this situation and has shown that the process of image recognition needs to be rethought. Phenomenology is the fundamental ontology according to the understanding of Husserl, the German Jewish philosopher and founder of phenomenological philosophy. It is the foundation of all sciences and is primarily concerned with the systematic consideration and examination of the structure of 'things', that is, events that occur in consciousness and conscious action. As an impartial field of study rooted in various sciences, it is directly based on philosophy, psychology and logic, and indirectly on other sciences, and in this respect resembles mathematics. The role of mathematics in the positive sciences is directly present in philosophy, psychology and logic; since it is related to every real thing and event, it plays an indirect role in all sciences. According to Husserl, phenomenology refers to the totality of a thing, for example a living thing, rather than to any particular state of it; it attributes perception to perception, judgment to judgment and emotion to emotion. This is similar to mathematics talking about numbers and geometry talking about shapes. Just as mathematics, geometry and mechanics are the foundations of the exact sciences,

phenomenology is the foundation of philosophy, logic and psychology. The same applies here. Just as geometry is applied to all forms of nature and the universe, phenomenology is applied to all branches of science (Husserl, 1995: 16-17). In addition, Husserl (1973), in his book *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, examined how images are formed in our consciousness and their roles in our minds, and believed that images are mental representations of objects and how these representations are related to lived experiences and our brains. The contrast between the physical appearance of a work of art as an object and its semantic appearance during aesthetic experience is one of the themes of phenomenology. Husserl (1973), especially with regard to the visual arts, distinguishes art from other phenomena that have practical possibilities in daily life by the fact that it exists primarily to be seen or felt (p. 171). What is decisive here for Husserl is that it breaks away from the ontological representation of the work of art and brings us to the pictorial world of the mind behind the work (Esen, 2023).

### Photo Analysis Considering Phenomenology

The dictionary meaning of the word analysis is: To examine the nature of the whole, the relationships between the wholes, and the relationships of the whole by separating the whole into its parts. Analyzing photographs on a certain basis can help increase people's attention and ensure that the photograph is interpreted, given meaning and its personal importance. At the very least, this method allows the imagination to be trained. Of course, the biggest factor in choosing a photograph to be "read" is the presence of a photographer who has carefully brought together the qualities of that photograph. A photographer is like a hunter; he skillfully captures moments and images. Reading a photograph is a matter of knowledge and intuition. If one of these is missing, language can only tell what is in the frame. Reading a photograph is not seeing it as other people see it. This means that you will discover something new every time you look at it. It is about skillfully combining knowledge and photographic experience with images. It can be read together with the concepts of *studium* and *punctum* shared in Barthes' work "Camera Lucida", where he conceptualized his ideas about photography. According to Barthes (2008, pp. 41-43), the effort to explain the multiple meanings that photographs offer to the viewer and to create meaning through the analysis of semiotic codes is considered as a comprehensive study. At first glance, the gaze, like a detective, pursues the traces of meaning and heads towards a comprehensive discovery in the world of the photograph. The tensions resulting from the opposition between extension and condensation and confusion emerge during the investigation. *Punctum*, on the other hand, is a completely subjective perception that is inexplicably separated from the dominant meaning in the photograph. *Punctum* is not an explainable situation. Research reveals itself through the act of trying to explain. For example, in a war photograph depicting a deadly battle between two soldiers, we can perceive the stones scattered around the photograph by focusing on the stones rolling on the ground. In fact, Barthes said that he was so impressed by the crooked teeth of a historical photograph of two children that he could not explain it. Barthes believes that the meaning is more intense and clear in photographs that contain the unity of *studium* and *punctum*, and he attributes this to the fact that some photographs are seen as too

privileged to give meaning to *punctum* (2008, p.59). Barthes discovered the result of a photographic language that has many overlapping meanings and is extremely subjective. This is clear evidence that photography cannot be reduced to a mechanical language. The abstract and artistic language of photography is a fertile structure waiting to be discovered. Every re-reading of a photograph is a process of re-confronting the moment the photograph was taken. Although this is not possible in a phenomenological context, the traces left in the photograph (optical and chemical) come together to form a relief, just like our memory of a situation experienced only once in front of the camera. In order for the reader to evaluate the photograph in front of them, they must be able to establish a connection between time, objects and people (Artful Living, 2013). However, according to Boydaş (2007: 29), four steps should be followed in the process of criticizing an artwork: description, analysis, interpretation and evaluation; to define them;

**Description:** It is the identification and description of the information objects found in the image. The first thing to do is to make a complete list of the visual and sensory objects seen in the work. Every object visible on the surface, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem, should be included in the list.

**Analyze:** It includes an approach on how to create visual elements in works based on design principles. From this perspective, the process of evaluating the elements in the photograph in line with design principles is important at this stage of the analysis process.

**Interpretation:** The interpretation stage of a work is the most exciting, final and most personal stage of art criticism. The data collected in the description and criticism stages are the most important documents regarding the meaning of the work. However, works of art have quite complex structures. Interpretations may differ from person to person.

**Evaluation:** Evaluation is the final stage of the critique of a work of art. In this step, all the data obtained previously are used. The data used to evaluate the artistic skill of a work of art is based on facts. In addition, a simple sketch of the illuminated and detailed parts of the picture frame is attempted to be made in order to detail the structure of the photograph and the contribution of various graphic elements to the creation of the composition.

### Phenomenological Interpretations in Photography with Abstract Examples

#### Abstraction Experiments in Photography on Ice

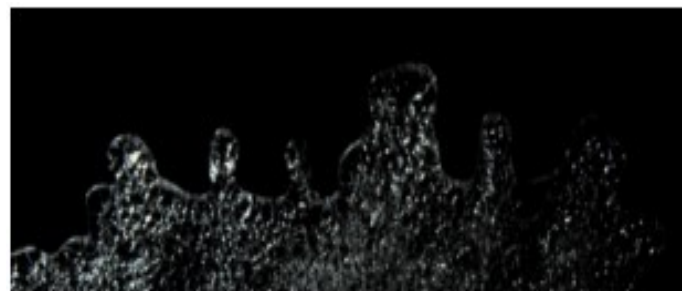


Image 1. Cold-Faced Men of Darkness (Uzun, 2020, p.116)

Ice can be artificial or natural depending on its material properties. Artificially created ice has a sculptural value, but ice created by snowfall and weather conditions has a more abstract value. This is because the life of ice created by nature on the surface is short and its structure is constantly changing, so its shape is instantly specific and has an abstract expression that creates a photographic appearance. These shapes discovered through photographic vision contribute to the creation of conceptual meaning by considering the coldness of the ice, the value of the color and its harmony with the light.

### General Description

Ice crystallization can be seen under the glass surface to add depth to the composition. The contrast that divides the shooting area into upper and lower areas creates an equal balance between black and white. In his abstract photography experiments on ice, the artist has followed an approach that reflects the existential struggle between the conflict of heat and cold, the surface icing caused by snowfall and cold.

### Narrative Structure

Artificial light was used to illuminate and color the ice as an object placed within the composition. In this work, which is considered an example of lyrical abstraction, the glass surface representing darkness embodies a sense of transparency and permeability that gathers universal infinity in the background. The use of amorphous lines represented by blocks of ice within the crowd was used as a conscious choice to emphasize individual originality in the world of photography and emphasizes the concept of self limited by massification and similarity. It completes internal and social alienation by referring to the unknown encounters and orientations of the "crowd".

### Colors

The contrast of black and white, which emphasizes the contradictory and ambiguous structure of the contrast and the destructive attitude of unity, establishes multimodal themes such as good and evil, darkness and light, freedom and captivity in philosophical thought. The dominance of black in the picture symbolizes the spiritual weight arising from the darkness of the existence of the masses, while white symbolizes the resistance of life patterns symbolizing human existence. It is thought that the sharp meaning used to distinguish between existence and non-existence is related to the dilemma of conditioning and the invisible border between black and white.

### Meaning

Darkness, which is the concrete meaning expressed by the tone of black in the photograph, represents emotions such as melancholy, introversion, gloom, alienation, and pessimism at the conceptual level where abstract meanings are constructed. Ice, another concreteness in the photograph, points to both the formation of man and the problems of the relations that form the axis of the contrast between man's social and personal existence. Next to the ornaments that symbolize the collective crisis abstractly, shapeless figures resembling ice blocks are seen.

The meaningful and fundamental contradictions of photography include compromises and conflicts resolved on the thin line between the people and the individual. In the age of civilization, where existence and non-existence cannot be distinguished from each other, a society model that cools down in the flexibility of the ties between people is being built (Uzun, 2020).

### Abstraction Experiments in Photography on Water



**Image 2. Unity in the Clash (Uzun, 2020, p.117)**

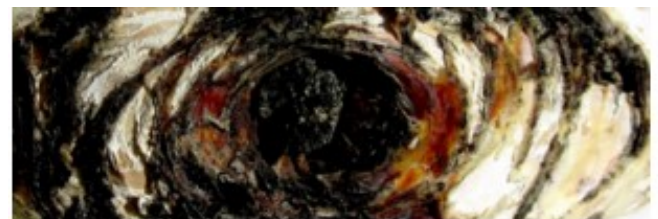
**General Description:** This photograph shows the moment when two separate full-frame images meet. The moments of water leakage and collision are depicted as a mixture of speed, movement and violence. In the clear and unclear photographs of the movement of life, we can see the refraction of light on one side and the formation of shapes resisting the flow on the other.

**Narrative Structure:** The spatial narrative of the photograph has used unlimited techniques to symbolize universal space, expand the perception of space and free it from obvious limitations.

**Colors:** Although the simplicity of white is clearly seen in photographs taken in natural light such as sunlight, the color gamut resulting from the refraction of light in the flow area is subtle but striking. The gray and white contrast representing infinite colors. The sense of light and darkness created by the intensity of light also creates symbolic shapes that create abstract meaning in the photograph.

**Meaning:** The infiltration of the calmness of compromise into the images of conflict leaves the creation of this dimension of meaning to the interpretive practices of the target audience.

### Abstraction Experiments in Photography on the Surface



**Image 3. Plato's Cave (Uzun, 2020, p.118)**

**General Description:** The main image in the photograph is actually a hollow in the tree trunk. This image is reminiscent of a half-open pupil in the middle of a cave, but represents an open perception pushed back by the cave entrance.

**Narrative Structure:** At the symbolic level of the narrative, the details of the object placement and curves are expressed in a way that meaningfully emphasizes the contradictions in the composition. This image dreams of liberation but is hesitant to go far away in its endless anxiety of freedom, plays the game of freedom in its own "coastal region" and cannot get away from its captivity, tells the stories of people.

**Colors:** The intensity and variety of colors in the photograph are the meeting of white, which consists of hard and soft changes with a flow from right to left, against a black spiral, and red and black in the section called the exit of the cave. Here, blood symbolizes freedom. The resistance of yellow and red in the center and then the gradual change of white show that the struggle for human freedom, although difficult, always reaches light and white.

**Meaning:** In the painting, strength is treated as the opposite of weakness. The strong taking over the weak symbolizes a captive community that will not give up the fight.

#### Abstraction Experiments in Photography Through Light



Image 4. Metaphorical Tearing: Barrage of Meteors (Uzun, 2020, p.119)

**General Description:** This photograph has a metaphorical meaning created by the awning made of spears that wears out over time and allows sunlight to enter.

**Narrative Structure:** In photography, narrative aims to convey the sense of clarity and brightness by creating the effect of long exposure of light in a room. The abstract message of the photograph is the discomfort and fear created by the violent movement of meteors following chaotic directions in space. The semantic shock created by moving at the same speed as a meteor and having no purpose causes individuals to share the speed of light in a fixed frame and question the sharpness of abstract meaning. Events that cannot be seen in photographs can be expressed using light. Photography transcends time and space due to the abstract nature of meaning. Because it can happen anywhere at any time. The chaotic wrath of the universe is not limited to any place or time. This abnormal situation that disrupts normality is often seen with divine wisdom.

**Colors:** The use of color in photography consists of the selection of white and black tones to distinguish the presence and absence of light. Black, which most concretely expresses the absence of light, establishes a relationship with white, one of the most lived forms of existence.

**Signification:** The contrast in the visual determines a mutual war in which chaotic violence and speed are combined with suffocating stillness and the need to feel safe.

**Le Corbusier's Photographic Aesthetics:** 20th century avant-garde designer and architect Le Corbusier worked in various forms of visual art throughout his career. Le Corbusier was dedicated to promoting modernism and to showcasing his architectural spaces to a wide audience. Le Corbusier had a unique understanding of the medium of photography. Photography became a means for him to capture the spatial and luminous qualities of his designs, and with his photographic approach he conveyed his architectural vision more effectively. With it, he began to explore the built environment by freezing moments in time. This influence is also evident in his architecture.

In the book "Le Corbusier and the Power of Photography", written by Herschdorfer and Lada Umstatter and edited by Nathalie, a simple summary of his attitude towards photography is: "a 'machine' that allows one to see and at the same time communicate, without fail." Here, Le Corbusier's use of photography is described almost as a tool. He communicated with the space through photographs, making it a way to promote his work and bringing each one to life as a manifesto. Although the photographs that illustrate his architectural works are described as such, his own use of photography is quite interesting. Le Corbusier's personal photographic creation and his experimentalism in his creativity can be considered almost a secret process.

According to Tim Benton in his book "Le Corbusier Le Grand", Le Corbusier rarely published his own photographs (Benton, 2008). In addition, the camera he used in his photography has remained a secret to this day, although there are a few clues in his diary. Even so, Le Corbusier's group photographs of people, buildings and places, including postcards, magazines and publications, have been a supporting memory and... stimulating factor for his book illustrations and therefore "his paintings" (Benton, 2008).

His use of high contrast, usually with shadows, reveals the simplicity of his spaces with a certain dynamism when he photographs asymmetrical compositions that reveal an emotion. In addition, this preference for black and white has allowed his architectural forms and materials to gain a different appearance. In addition, when his photographs are examined, it is seen that the single-point perspective is generally in the foreground (Image 5). The reason for this is to reveal the depth of the space in the photographic representation.



Image 5. Le Corbusier, Villa Stein, Garches, France, 1927 (Rowe, 2014)

Another important point in Le Corbusier's photographs is light. While he defines architecture as "the masterful, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together under light", as expected, light is sharply felt in the representation of these masses (Le Corbusier, 1999, p.23). Light is not only a source of illumination, it also affects the mood in a space. He always takes his photographs during the day. His architectural style generally tends to have many windows that provide as much natural light as possible. He captures the play of light, the interaction of volumes and integration within the architectural space. Wanting to emphasize the importance of how light interacts with architectural elements, Le Corbusier consciously placed great emphasis on the choice of lighting in his photographic method. The images captured by Le Corbusier convey the atmosphere and usability of a room to viewers.



**Image 6. Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, 1931 (Yıldırım and Almer, 2012)**

In addition, the space that Le Corbusier wanted to create and therefore transfer to photography included natural scenes from everyday life. For this reason, Le Corbusier's photographs frequently show objects interacting with the architecture, emphasizing the purpose and scale of the architecture. To this end, Le Corbusier uses objects as a means of telling a story. The idea of object placement and the promotion of presence and intimacy are of great importance in the representation of space, and this principle is in line with the phenomenological school of thought. Through his lens, everyday objects serve as main characters, establishing a more personal connection between the viewer and the space. Narrative methods change and are strengthened through furniture placement. This approach allows people to imagine themselves occupying these spaces, because, clearly, architectural photography is a more relatable record of human experience. Le Corbusier places certain objects, such as hats and coats, in the interior spaces to be photographed (Image 6). These carefully selected objects show that they are part of the life lived there. The aim here is; He states that the photographs are staged in the way the spaces are used by the people living in them.

Allowing the house to be used for a while before taking the photographs does not make the space feel "staged" but rather adds to its uniqueness. For example, he has placed a hat on a table in front of an unlit fireplace. In another example, he frames his photographs by leaving the balcony door open

(Image 7), aiming to give viewers the feeling that the residents have just left the place. The Villa Savoye in this example was designed by Le Corbusier as an example of the "machine as house" paradigm, so that the functions of daily life inside become critical to its design.



**Image 7. Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, 1931 (<https://www.fondationlecorbusier.fr>)**

Béatrice Colomina states that in the photographs of Le Corbusier's rooms, these objects remain as "traces" of the architect, and that "there is never a trace left of the 'home' in the traditional sense." "There is never a trace of the 'home state' in the traditional sense. It can also be thought that these objects represent the architect. The hat, coat, and glasses are definitely Le Corbusier's belongings. They play a role similar to Le Corbusier's role in the film *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*; they just drop by; they don't live in the house, they pass through it." (Colomina, 2011: 323). Architects are literally visitors. Le Corbusier wanted to give the impression that "someone was there and left a trace on the table with their coat and hat." In his published works, Le Corbusier used the semantic potential of objects to convey the life he imagined through photography. However, there are no traces of real life (such as objects used during accommodation) in the frame. Because, as stated before, the photographs are taken before the user moves in. Le Corbusier has created a simulation of life. Objects are the traces that define this simulation.

## CONCLUSION

The phenomenological approach to space produces a powerful story that still has an impact on contemporary photographers and architects. Le Corbusier's architectural perspective managed to capture the spirit of his ideas through his photographic scenarios. The standard of living in an architectural space defined by Le Corbusier and the organization of his photographic documentation are parallel to the phenomenological philosophy. It is clear that he used photography as a tool to investigate the interaction with his work as well as to document it. The lighting and photo editing make them both approachable and inspiring. In short, Le Corbusier's images are much more than records; they are works of art and in their own right, they present photography and architecture together, capturing the spirit of modernism and demonstrating its enduring power.

His modernist design concept is characterized by purity and simplicity. He clearly recognized his ability to transform the perception of architecture. In short, Le Corbusier's photographic attitudes have left a very influential mark on architecture. His ability to capture the essence of his designs, his experiential qualities, and the merging of photography and architectural environments have fostered a dialogue between their works. His creativity continues to be reflected in his work and influences the artistic environment as his legacy continues. As a result, his interest in photography is not accidental; it serves as an integral part of his architectural practice.

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