# Marcel Duchamp's *Tu m'* (1918): A Visual Inquiry into Perception

Goal: Discern the Theory of Perception that *Works Best*

- The *best* theory minimizes the gap between what appears and what is actually present (Duchamp's apparition vs. appearance).

- Demonstrate *Tu m'*'s Utility as a Perceptual Skills Test

- Employ *Tu m'* as a Case Study to Test:

  Snapshot Conception of Perceptual Phenomenology

  Qualia Theory of Perception

  The Enactive Approach to Perception

Tu m''s original placement in Katherine Dreier's NYC apartment (1918-1952)
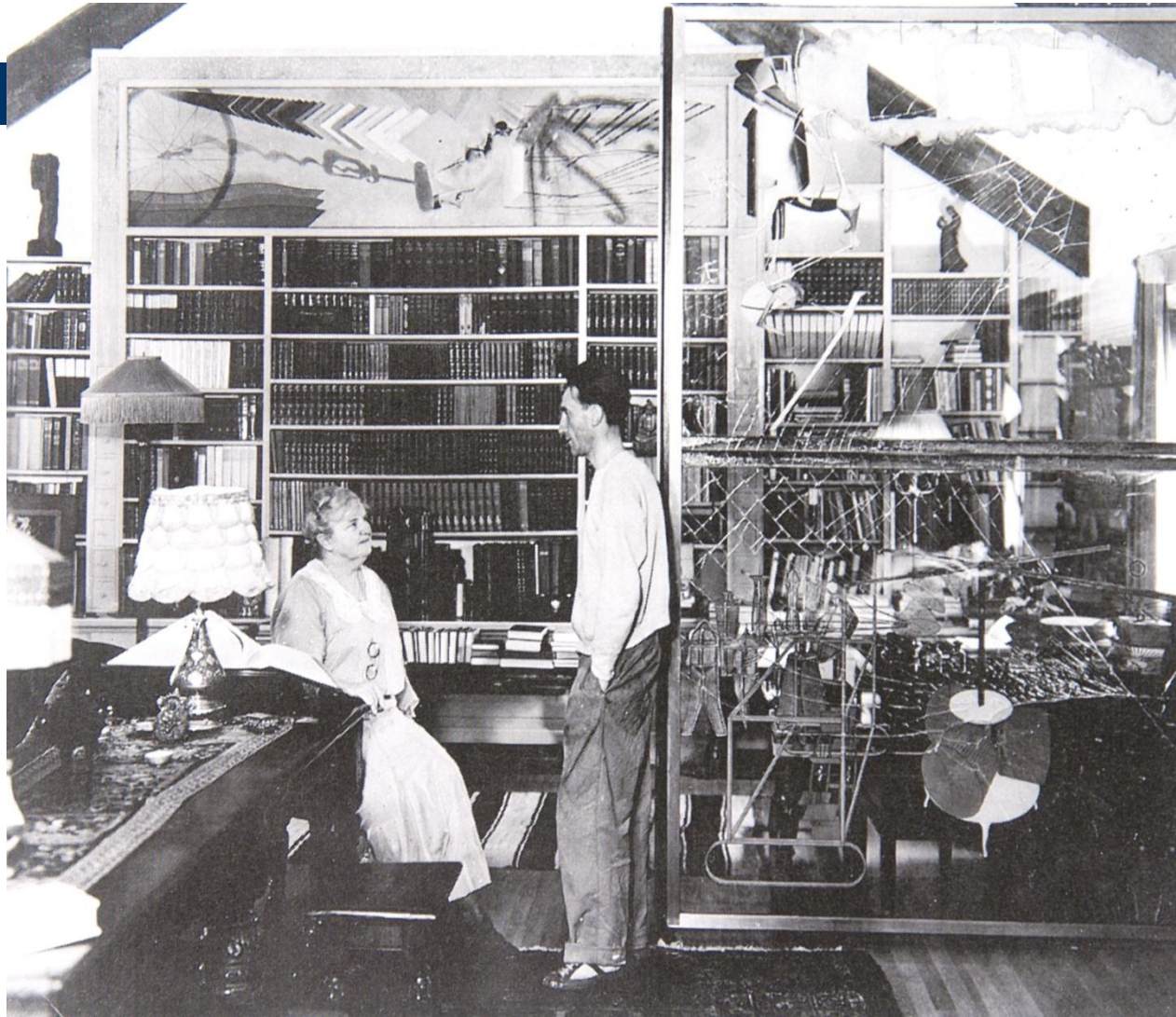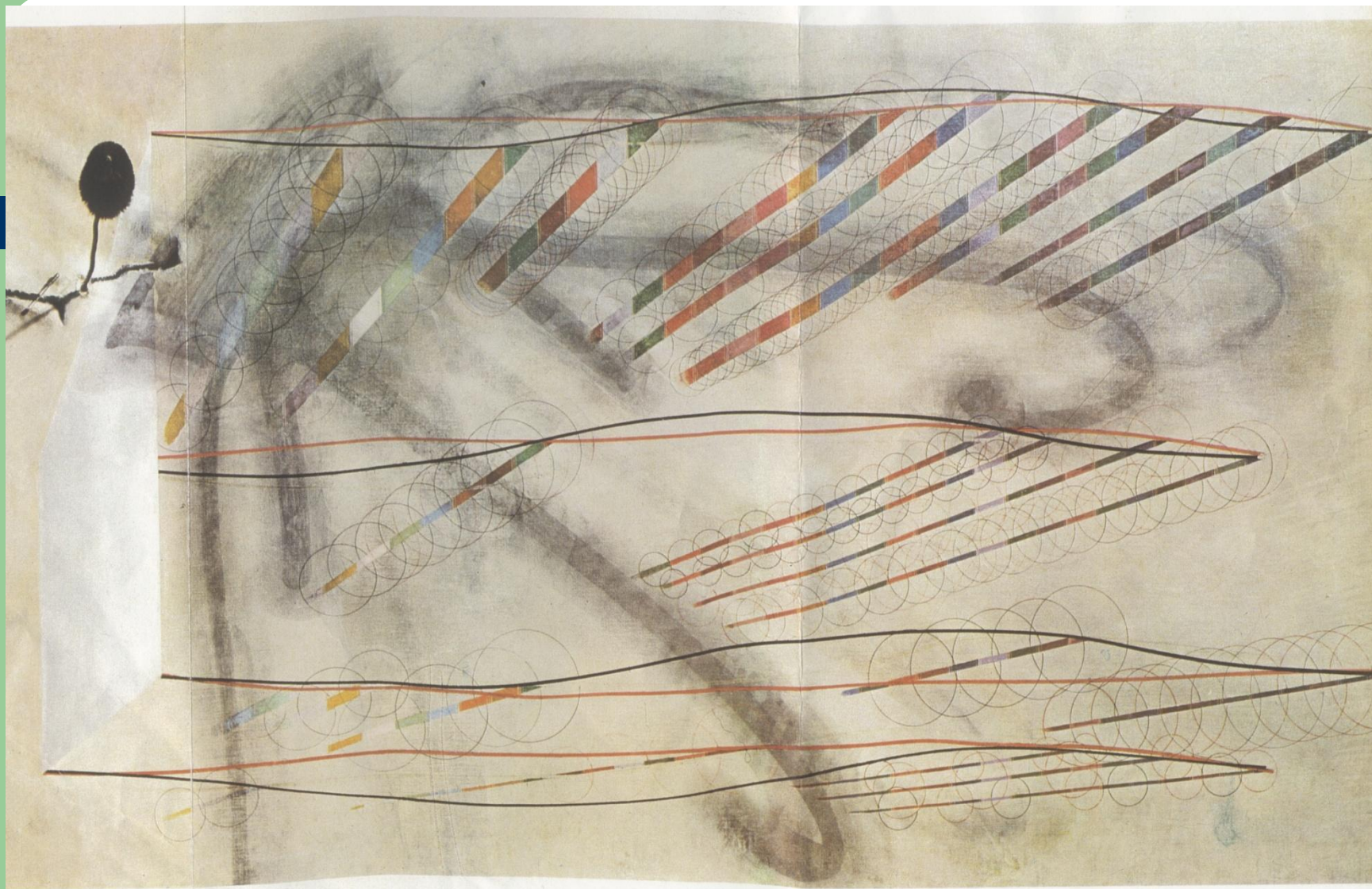
Tu m' as a Perceptual Skills Test
first public appearance 1952- Yale University Art Gallery

Tu m' visualizes various *new* (for 1918) perceptual problems, such as a) rendering 3rd and 4th Dimensions on a 2-D surface without perspective, b) experiencing bi-color variations, c) depicting infinite space, and d) characterizing the rotation of axes within a plane (the twisting white square).

As a test, it requests the spectator to:
1. identify imagery from extant works. *Bicycle Wheel* (1913/1951), *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913-1914) or *Hat Rack* (1917/1964)

2. notice the relationship between 3 brownish slats (templates) on lower left to 8 curves to painting's right-hand side?

3. envisage the white trapezoid as a "twisting" plane (3-D) flapping perpendicular to the painting's surface?

Tu m', 1918

Tu m' as a Perceptual Skills Test

4. recognize 4th Dimension rendering? In particular a rolling sphere? .

5. comment on how color affect another color's color?

6. explain the tear on the painting's surface?

7. discern a real safety-pin shadow from a painted shadow? A real safety pin from a painted pin?

8. What aspects of this painting's imagery does one "see as x," where x = 1-7?

Snapshot Conception of Perceptual Phenomenology

These three theories are most appropriate since they're premised on 'looks', qualia, or P-properties, avoiding mental entities such as mental representations, sense data, or subpersonal content.

Under snapshot conception, we readily grasp all that is present to assemble lots of visual data about the work of art. Visual experience appears in "sharp focus, uniform detail, and brilliant color." Our art writer inevitably becomes the "scene surveyor." Our experience is so clear: we seem to be recording "pictures in the head."

Problems- *Change blindness*- one fails to notice colors change.

Inattentional blindness - no one notices man in gorilla suit.

So much to see, so we break it up into sections or parts.

Enormous discrepancy between input and output (p. 37).

Problems cont.

    Alva Noë- perceptual experience is really "fragmented, discontinuous, and sparsely detailed."

To compensate for our meager starting point, the retinal picture, scientists suppose that we experience what is represented by a "picture in the head."
Like the blind spot, the brain fills in the rest.

Alternatively, imagery's being present in the world, its access is readily available. facilitates total access all the time. We download from the world, rather than upload pictures from our head.

Conclusion: Despite its potential for objectivity (the process is public), the snapshot conception doesn't work for art, whose tendencies toward unfamiliarity and unmemorizability make "storing pictures in the head" quite difficult.

Qualia Theory of Perception

Qualia convey the magnitude of a subjective affective quality caused by some perceptual experience.

Under QT, property of redness is a quality of the experience.
➔Two people who are identical in all behavioral dispositions (including their sensorimotor skills and discriminatory capacities) could differ in what it is like for them to experience something red looking.

Inverted Spectrum Hypothesis- only one red➔rosy and orangish Christopher Peacocke calls these *apparent colors*- divergence between properties of what it is like to have an experience and the properties the experience presents the world as having.

The way we represent the world (experience apparent colors) shapes the actual experiences we have. Red things are really rosy.

Qualia Theory of Perception
from Gareth Evans (1946-1980)
The Varieties of Reference (1982)

conceptual content- the type of contents that can be the objects of propositional attitudes and the meanings of sentences.

nonconceptual content- perceptual experience's phenomenal content or "biological information processing."

Art writing is the process of identifying conceptual content and eventually transforming nonconceptual into conceptual content.

Peacocke- In addition to the world's representational features, perceptual experience also possesses qualitative or sensational features that are not features of the way the experience represents things as being. Sensational properties of experience.

Qualia Theory of Perception

This validates the co-presence of *Tu m''s* minimal amount of conceptual content with nonconceptual (unfamiliar) content.

Philosophers of the "actual intentionalist" ilk (looking to identify the proper intention) can focus on what is propositional, leaving the phenomenal to art historians to render sensible.

Peacocke Paradox- can't differentiate a tree at a distance from one nearby when both are the same height.
  ➔ Scale, or "size in the visual field" must be a nonrepresentational feature of experience.
     Of course, this is not true. Scale is a relational property (perceiver's distance to object perceived).

Most problematic- sensory modalities (5 senses) differ qualitatively.

Rather, our familiarity with tactile experiences enables us to discern the magnitudes of sight's spatial vectors.

Enactive Approach: Vision is Touch-like

Sensorimotor skills mediate experience the way Kantian concepts mediate intuitions.

Alva Noë- "Vision is a process of gleaning how things are, apart from how they appear, from the active exploration of structured looks space (e.g. the space of perspectival properties). Touch… awareness of same environment, but *as* mediated by patterns in how things *feel*." (p. 107)

Perception is relational, not fixed. It depends on viewer's perspective. That tree looks just as short because it is just as short. Since we see that it's farther away, it must also be *actually* taller.

Look to P-properties (perspectival properties such as apparent shape and size). Identify *Invariance* to qualify perceptions. P-properties are just as "real" as actual properties.

Of or by Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy (the Bôite-en-Valise) (1935-1941)

Perceiving *Tu m'* in Light of the Enactive Approach

Exemplifies enactive relationship- unusually wide (3' x 10'), hung high, out of reach, literally and metaphorically. No toe hold- only a stack of color swatches, ethereal columns, a torn canvas, and a pointing hand.

Noë "Our ability to perceive not only depends on, but is constituted by, our possession of *sensorimotor knowledge,"* which we tap when we automatically move about to get a better look.

Discovering what is invariant requires one to track the movement-dependent changes in P-properties. Duchamp's notes on the back of a 1914 gas bill demonstrate his awareness of tracking. He differentiates the flat eye form the 3-D eye: the former entails a wandering perception. It has a tactile perception of 3-D perspective, which he associates with the object present in one's hand.

P-properties, which cover size and shape, require viewers to discover what is invariant, as compared to colors which are relational between colors, thus requiring tracking under different lighting conditions.

A Primer on P-Properties: Perceiving *Tu m''s* Imagery

Images Betray Cameraman's Position: Four other views- side, from above- from left & from right, and head on.
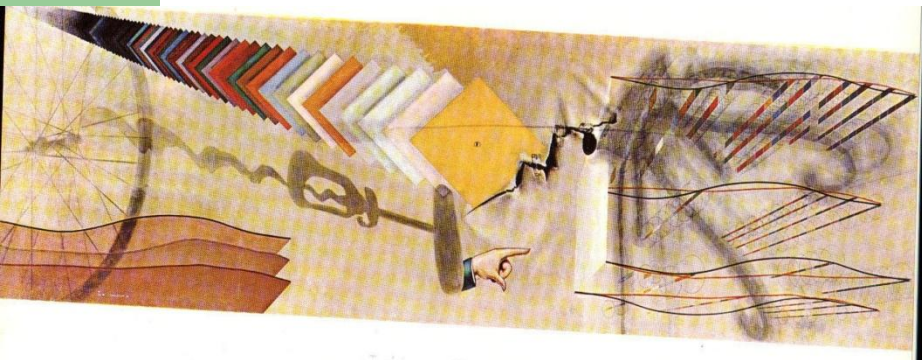
Paint a Cast Shadow
of a Readymade
Notes from *Green Box* (1934)

1916, the same year Duchamp first uses the word readymade, Dewey cites it too.

:shadow cast by *Readymades*

shadow cast by 2, 3, 4, Readymades. "brought together"
    (Perhaps use an enlargement of that so as to extract
from it a figure formed by an equal [length] (for ex.) taken
in each Readymade and becoming by the projection of
the cast shadow for ex. 10 cm in the first Readymade
                                10 cm in the 2nd "", etc.
each of these 10cm. having become part of the cast shadow
    Take. These "having become" and from them make a
tracing without of course changing their position in
relation to each other in the original projection.

Hat Rack (1917) in "Spirit Photo" and *Tu m'* (1918)
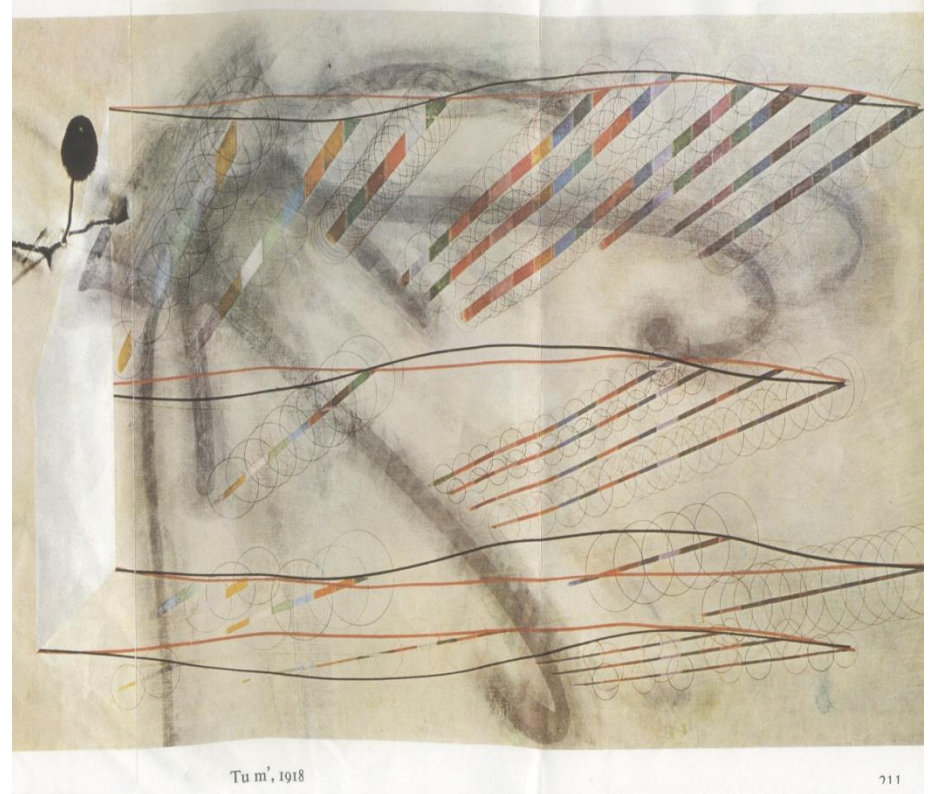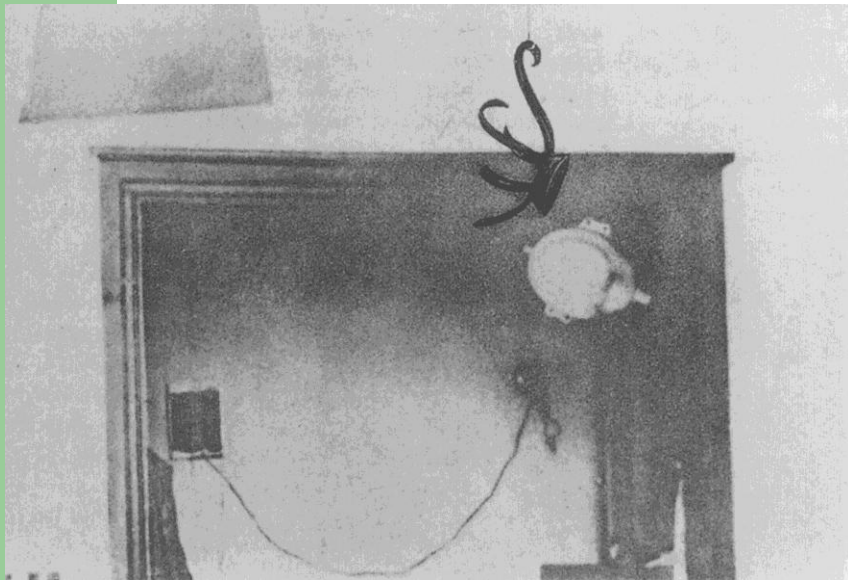
Tu m', 1918

Enhanced Enactive Approach

Noë proposes that sensorimotor knowledge does all of the work.

His colleague Hubert Dreyfus argues that intentional states associated with experience are only representational when something goes awry (breakdown states) and stops the flow.

With art experiences, something is always breaking down.

It doesn't seem possible to entirely replace nonconceptual content with sensorimotor knowledge, as Noë claims. Does a child who sees calculus symbols as phenomenal lack sensorimotor skills or the entire mathematical foundation necessary to conceptualize mathematics in those terms.

I therefore propose keeping nonconceptual content as a placeholder for cognition on its way from unidentifiable perceptual experience to conceptual content.