

When Ruskin wrote his piece on *The Elements of Drawing* in 1858, he was really pushing back against the grain of art teaching at that time. He mentions at the start of the series that he wishes to provide an alternative to the teaching practices which were popular at the time. The goal, it seemed to him, was to train students to *emulate* the work of “second-rate artists” or to further the rapid manufacture of designs (Ruskin, 1858, pp. 9, 10). The idea of the “innocence of the eye” came from his insistence that the aim of teaching was not to reproduce other artists work, but to reproduce colours and shades as they appear to the eye – without the interference of the artists experience; innocent as a child or a blind man; thereby creating a unique and realistic piece.

**Comment [WU1]:** good

The paragraph discussing the innocence of the eye begins with a philosophical statement which reads “the perception of solid form is entirely a matter of experience”. This theory that reality is constructed by our perception of our environment is discussed, many years later, by John R. Searle in *The Construction of Social Reality*. While there are over 100 years of thought between these two authors, similar and contrasting ideas about reality are discussed throughout both volumes.

**Comment [WU2]:** good. Research pays off!

Ruskin compares the required ability of a true artist to be similar to those of an infant, or a blind person who has just gained sight; where the world around them consists entirely of various shades of colour. Ruskin states very clearly that “the whole art of Painting consists merely in perceiving the shape and depth of [...] patches of colour, and putting patches of the same size depth and shape on canvas” (Ruskin, 1858, p. 23). In this way, Ruskin is stating that the world consists of intrinsic shapes, colours, physical composition, chemical composition. Searle also discusses this in *The Construction of Social Reality*, where he explains that intrinsic features of physical objects exist without the need for the attitude or need of an observer; a stone is a physical object whether one had ever known it to be a stone or not. Searle goes on to explain that “when we begin to specify further features that we might call *intrinsic* to nature and those features that exist *relative to the intentionality of observers*” (Searle, 1995, p. 9). Ruskin would, in my opinion, insist that a true Artist will paint the world exactly as he sees it at an intrinsic level, without the interference of the intentionality of the artist as an observer. This is what he meant when he described the “innocence of the eye”.

**Comment [WU3]:** Phenomenology and in particular J-P Sartre’s form of Existentialism has a lot to say about this idea...“existence precedes essence”

Interpretation of Tansey’s painting in light of this

Taking this into consideration, I think that Tansey’s painting is quite tongue-in-cheek. The painting itself is done in monochrome, rather than colour, which feels like an educational diagram rather than an aesthetic work of art. Within the painting itself we see men with clipboards and laboratory-like clothing, taking notes. We see that the men are looking at the cow, not at the painting. They have unveiled the painting from behind a curtain which now lies on the floor. The painting and the cow are within a museum or gallery setting, not outdoors which would be the natural environment for a cow. The painting of the straw bale in the background is, perhaps, there to encourage the cow to feel more comfortable – although the gilded frame would immediately remove that possibility.

**Comment [WU4]:** Ruskin talks about colour, is Tansey contradicting him?

**Comment [WU5]:** Do you know what that painting is? In case you don’t, it is by Claude Monet and is one of a series of paintings of grainstacks that he made. Why do you think Tansey put an Impressionist work there?

The painting suggests to me that the men – representing perhaps the Institute of Art itself – are relying on the opinion, the reaction, of this cow to determine... what? Should the cow recognise this work of art, would that make the art realistic and therefore worthy of being made in the “innocent eye”? Is Tansey suggesting that the Institution of Art is relying on antiquated methods of judgement to ascribe the title of “Art” to a candidate work? Or, even

more provocatively, is Tansey equating the Institute of Art to the cow itself? Danto wrote that art is “any artefact... which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the art world)” (Freeland, 2001, pp. 37, 38).

Comment [WU6]: Or just the visitors to it?

It is difficult to tell from the painting what the cow’s opinion of the painting is. She does appear to be looking at it, but there is no indication of her approval or not. This is not particularly surprising, when to take Searle’s work into account, it would seem that observers (presumably there is no discrimination against bovine observers) will not view the painting with an “innocent eye” but with all of their relational, intentional, historical observations categorising it as a “something”. Therefore, for the cow to see these marks on the canvas and relate them to her previous experience of other cows in nature, she would need to possess the cognitive ability to do so. I do not know a lot about cows, but perhaps this is not possible, particularly when the painting is placed in such an unsuitable environment.

Comment [WU7]: good

I find myself returning again and again to the “test” word in the title. What is the test? What would be considered a pass? What are they testing for? My conclusion, time and again, is that these official-looking men are basing the worth of a piece – not yet framed, therefore not yet “deemed worthy” – on the reactions of an incompetent jury. I feel that this can only be a criticism of the Art World, of the religiosity of “works of art” and Museums, of the world of art criticism itself.

Comment [WU8]: good

References:

## Bibliography

Freeland, C., 2001. *Art Theory A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ruskin, J., 1858. *The Elements of Drawing in Three letters to Beginners*. New York: Wiley & Halsted.

Searle, J. R., 1995. *The Construction of Social Reality*. The Free Press ed. New York: Simon & Schuster.

### PART B

**What are the implications of saying perspective was invented, and what are the implications of saying it was discovered. Assess these two possibilities and give reasons for the one you believe is correct.**

**Make a list of things you know to be invented and things you know to be discovered. Consider what distinguishes them and where perspective is best placed. Try to be attentive to counter arguments.**

Saying that perspective was either invented or discovered is subjective to the type of perspective you are discussing. The definition of perspective is two-fold; either the interpretation of the world as 3D where shapes and environments have physical depth, or the perspective of one’s attitudes towards, or way of seeing something. Both could be applicable to this question, considering the course that we are taking.

Comment [WU9]: This is very true and perhaps the nub of the matter.

Saying that perspective in painting – the creation of depth, of 3D appearance – is discovered means that at some point it existed but had not been recognised or had not existed at all. A quick internet search on the topic brought me to a painting which is considered to have been the “first” painting to use Linear Perspective by Filippo Brunelleschi in 1415 (see below). What strikes me as uncomfortable about the description of perspective as being discovered, is that perspective has always been part of human daily life. If perspective was only “discovered” at some point, it would mean that the artist suddenly realised that the world is three dimensional, and then decided he should include this important information in his work. That doesn't sit right with me.

**Comment [WU10]:** But we talk about Australia as being ‘discovered’ though it had been there for millions of years.

Physical interpretation of perspective, depth, in our day to day lives; our observations as users of our environment, must be considered to have been discovered. Perspective, in this manner, is something that every person discovers in childhood and learns to understand as an intrinsic part of their world. Items have depth; they take up space. An artist would be aware of this, and constantly attempt to include this detail in his work. Why then, did linear perspective only ‘appear’ in Brunelleschi's picture, in 1415? “Discovered” is the wrong term, I think.

**Comment [WU11]:** We can discuss

Perspective as invented makes more sense to me. It strikes me that since the artists before 1415 were naturally aware that the world is three dimensional, then they simply had not discovered a way to portray this in their work. Perspective is difficult, even for those of us well practiced in art creation, and it is not surprising that this technique was not just naturally available to all artists since the dawn of time. Perspective had to be understood to be re-created. And the invention of perspective, as a technique in art, would seem to me more likely.

**Comment [WU12]:** That is the important definition for your argument

If one considered “perspective” to mean how we see things, which I think is more likely given the course, the conversation is quite different.

**Comment [WU13]:** It is best to lay out your definitions or whatever at the beginning of your piece I think. We can discuss.

Perspective as ones way of seeing, is invented in so far as we base our perceptions of the world on our experiences. One could experience grass for example, in a positive or negative manner, depending on experience. However, our perspective is also discovered in that it can be reflected upon in order to determine what values our perspective holds. One can discover that ones perspective on something is faulty, or incorrect in some way. Our perspective is also both invented and discovered when we talk about our perspective of art, in that some institutions create – invent – an experience of art in a particular way, to control our perspective of the art. For example, placing a piece of art behind special glass, in a room of it's own, under special lighting, all creates a religious perspective for the viewer.

**Comment [WU14]:** An aspect of the term ‘perspective’ many students ignore.

However, we can also now come to perspective on art by discovery in today's world because of the internet. Our constant connectivity and the never ending database of works – without any context – means that our perspective of different art is discovered differently each time we view it in a different context. I found John Berger's BBC series on *Ways of Seeing* (Ways of Seeing, 1972) to be very informative on the subjects of perspective, observation and the construction of the reality we live in. I have not quoted directly from the series, but the series itself informed my thoughts on this piece.

**Comment [WU15]:** Fair enough,

Things I know to be invented:

**Comment [WU16]:** good

Money – does not exist naturally in the world without human involvement, was invented as a way to keep track of debts between people and to enshrine value on possessions.

Cameras – camera's were invented by a human being in order to capture the visual experience of a moment and reproduce it.

Telephone – the telephone was invented to fulfil a human need to communicate with other humans despite distance.

Things I know to be discovered:

Various animals – animals existed in the world outside of human observation or categorisation, they exist intrinsically in their own right. Their discovery relates to the human observation and therefore categorisation of them, as they were found in nature.

Fire – fire exists without human observation. It exists in a physical sense whether we agree it does or not.

Stars / Planets – stars and planets existed before our observation of them – although their discovery was really only possible after the invention of the telescope.

## References

*Ways of Seeing*. 1972. [Film] Directed by John Berger. UK: BBC.