

John White's and John Shearman's Viennese Art Historical Method

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At the beginning of *Only Connect* John Shearman (1931-2003) recounted a humorous incident in which a faculty member from comparative literature asks, "When...are art historians going to start interpreting?"¹ Shearman joked of being caught in a "have you stopped beating your wife" dilemma but it is clear from the story that he believed that art history had been doing interesting research, for a long time. In a precious reflection of his teacher, Johannes Wilde (1891-1970), Shearman explained that his aversion to theories was motivated more by a desire for quality and rigorous methods in scholarship.² Denying talk of methodological 'crises,' he admitted the field might be in 'ferment' but denied this might be solved by conceptual novelty. What he argued for was "quality of intuition, research, preparation, reasoning and presentation."

Like E. H. Gombrich, another Hapsburger who ended up in Great Britain, Wilde found English common sense quite to his temperament. Therefore, Shearman and Wilde were a good match. This position is well captured by Tristan Weddigen, at a commemorative session on Shearman in Toronto in 2004, in which he said that, "My impression is that Shearman was skeptical towards ideology and, therefore, averse to methodological discussions. As a pragmatic scholar, experienced with the common sense nature, complexity *and* banality of historical past, he was too conscious of the *longue durée* within the history of our field to be distracted by day-to-day academic polemics and personal politics."³ If it is nevertheless tempting to think that some of Shearman's sophistication is due to his mentor, Johannes Wilde of the Courtauld Institute of Art, who was trained in Vienna in the methodology of the Vienna School, he might say that he valued Wilde above all as simply a great scholar.

¹ John Shearman, *Only Connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3; On Shearman, see Alessandro Nova, "Percezione e ricezione negli scritti di John Shearman," *Römische Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 35 (2003/2004) [appeared 2005]: 17-22.

² John Shearman, "Johannes Wilde (1891-1970)," in Leopold Ettlinger, ed., *Akten des XXV. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte (1983)* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1984), 91-98.

³ Tristan Weddigen, "Functional Analysis of Art Works – Does it?" Toronto, 30 October 2004; c.f. "Zur Funktionsgeschichte," in Tristan Weddigen, Sible de Blaauw, Bram Kempers and Adalbert Roth, eds., *Functions and Decorations: Art and Ritual at the Vatican Palace in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Turnout: Brepols, 2003), 9-25.

Indeed, when I prepared an article on the German schools of *Strukturforschung* and *Koloritgeschichte*, Shearman replied very kindly and wrote that, "you have read all those Germans much more carefully than I and there is really nothing I can add. My approach to them was, as you have guessed, through Johannes Wilde, himself a pupil of Dvorak, and although he was well schooled in Formalism, Gestalt was not one of his words and I first heard it from Sydney Freedberg – even (or particularly) then I did not understand what it meant, and the concept still eludes me. I suspect it's not empirical enough for an Englishman."⁴ In fact, it is this knowledge of art history's long contribution that could leave him indifferent, since he had already inherited a few, powerful tools. Riches are in the eye of the beholder and because Wilde's teaching subtly introduced theoretical sophistication, it was not seen as such.

However, it can be argued that much more than filial piety links Wilde to his students.⁵ By investigating Shearman's methodology and exploring its roots in the Vienna School, I hope that this might help us to identify just what animated his fine scholarship and make it easier to adopt as a model. In fact, John White (1924-) and John Shearman were anything but common sense or unreflective scholars. Rather than follow their noses when writing their dissertations, they pored over the German *Koloritgeschichte* and *Strukturforschung* literature, which pops up occasionally. Perhaps they approached them as any good scholar would, as the working-through of the previous scholarly record. But owing to the unusual nature of the work, and the difficulty of finding it, it called for the abandonment of mere common sense. It is clear from later writings that each kept these old German works in their head as models of visual analysis. Thus, after the whole linguistic turn and revolutions in reader-response and Reception-aesthetics, in *Only Connect* Shearman quietly cited the old German literature with a sprinkling of the new, as if it was no big deal.⁶

This insight allows us to see elements in their works: an intense awareness of the formal integrity of the work of art or monument and its situation in space. The results are remarkable observations on the space and colour arrangements of different works of art. This methodology joins John Shearman in his investigations of colour in Tuscan painting, chiaroscuro in Leonardo, reconstructions of tapestries or the papal apartments to John White's investigations of space in medieval painting in his *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*.⁷ All these efforts stress an artistic logic which derives directly from Viennese interests.

But how did Wilde translate complex methods deriving from Riegl, Dvorak

⁴ John Shearman to Ian Verstegen, 2 November 1999. Ian Verstegen, "Gestalt, Art History, and Nazism," *Gestalt Theory* 24 (2004):134-150. This paper was written by 1997, when I solicited Shearman's opinion. For another British historian quite interested in expressing due to the Vienna school, see J. G. Alexander, "Otto Pächt 1902-1988," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 80 (1991), 453-72.

⁵ Johannes Wilde, *Michelangelo: Six Lectures*, edited by John Shearman and Michael Hirst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁶ Shearman, *Only Connect*, p. 6, note 3.

⁷ John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957).

and the 'second' Viennese school of Sedlmayr and Pächt? At least with John White, there was some direct influence from Pächt, which is fleshed out below.⁸ What I will argue is that Wilde used his English experience to filter, his initially quite rich and varied philosophical background – convincingly linked by Shearman to hermeneutics – to obtain a simplified functional interpretation. This method has a lot in common with the method of Sedlmayr and Pächt, but with only direct influence and more of a common evolution, a homologous method you might say.⁹

The purpose of this article is to define a general Viennese method, based on close observation of individual objects, and to compare it to the projects given to John White and Shearman. After defining what I take to be Johannes Wilde's fundamental approach to art history, I move on to the task of imaginative reconstruction of monuments, as shown in Wilde's work on the Great Council Hall of Florence. This I juxtapose with White and Shearman's own seminal reconstruction of the Raphael tapestries of the Sistine Chapel. Moving on to perspective and space within pictures, I relate White's work on linear perspective to Shearman's on the implied spectator, and relate their problematic to Viennese examples. Finally, taking the question of colour, not directly of interest to Wilde or Viennese theorists, but important to German-language formal art history, I investigate three themes in Shearman's art history relating to isochromatic colour, *cangianti* and 'tonal unity.'

Johannes Wilde and his Historical Method

White and Shearman learned from Wilde how to attend to function or what Otto Pächt called the "formal opportunity" afforded by a work of art, that is, its spatial placement and function that is presumed by artists as they set about their tasks. It can be argued that Wilde's impressive output, and that of his students, is motivated by a special sensitivity as to what such monuments were intended to do in the first place. Once this is known, questions of iconography take on a new meaning, because the range of meanings is constrained by physical and formal realities according to which only certain iconographic values will make sense. This point really has a much stronger theoretical import because it suggests that formal analysis must be presumed by good iconographic analysis and is the basis of the classic Viennese antipathy to Warburgian iconology in general and the work of Panofsky and Gombrich in particular.¹⁰

⁸ John White, "Developments in Renaissance Perspective," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12 (1949), 58-79.

⁹ Wilde read the classic literature on history: Dilthey, Troeltsch and Rickert. Sedlmayr refounded the Viennese method on Gestalt psychology, which was updated by Pächt. Shearman notes that he was not interested in these theoretical matters. What is at issue in this article is *methodology*.

¹⁰ Panofsky is already criticized in Hans Sedlmayr, "Die Quintessenz der Lehren Riegls," in Alois Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Vienna: Filser, 1929); Eng. trans. "The Quintessence of Riegl's Thought," in Richard Woodfield, ed., *Framing Formalism: Riegl's Work* (Amsterdam 2001). Pächt strongly criticized the iconological approach in his famous review, "Panofsky's *Early Netherlandish Painting*," *The*

Johannes Wilde's Vienna School credentials were outstanding, since he was old enough to have been trained by Riegl's direct student, Dvorak. In fact, he and Carl Maria Swoboda published Dvorak's most important work, the posthumous *Art History as a History of the Spirit*.¹¹ This work is most often interpreted as a close following of Riegl in deterministically locating art production in the developmental state of civilization. Wilde, however, also participated in the development of Viennese methodology and the creation of the 2nd or "new" school more often associated with Hans Sedlmayr and Otto Pächt. As plans continued for the republication of works by Viennese masters, a reassessment of them took place, reaching a head in the 1929 edition of Riegl's *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, in which Sedlmayr sought to capture the wide ramifications of the founding father's approach.¹² Interestingly, Sedlmayr thanks Wilde for the formulation of the central points in the book.¹³ Thus, it is not surprising that in 1931 Sedlmayr was expecting a contribution from Wilde for volume 2 of the new journal *Kunsthistorische Forschungen*.¹⁴ While Wilde was certainly not a central member of the coterie of theorists, remaining a slightly older and respected practitioner, he clearly did have sympathetic aims.

The analysis of function or 'formal opportunities' was the most important legacy of Wilde to White and Shearman. Gone were the speculative sketches of stylistic art history or deep iconological analysis. The intense looking and presumption of visual logic were what was ingrained. Functional analysis is found everywhere in Wilde's work, but especially in his work on the Great Council Hall of Florence and the Sistine Chapel.¹⁵ Wilde's problem was to gain some idea of the nature and appearance of the two great but lost frescoes by Leonardo and Michelangelo: Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari* (Florentine victory over the Milanese) and Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina* (Florentine victory over Pisa, 1369).

Burlington Magazine 98 (1956): 110-116; and in his methodological lectures published as *Methodisches zur Kunstgeschichte Praxis, ausgewählte Schriften* (Munich: Prestel, 1977); *The Practice of Art History: Reflections on Method*, translated by David Britt (New York: Harvey Miller, 1999).

¹¹ Max Dvorak, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte. Studien zur abendländischen Kunstentwicklung*, 2 vols., edited by Carl M. Swoboda and Johannes Wilde (Munich, 1924-1929).

¹² Hans Sedlmayr, "Die Quintessenz der Lehren Riegls," in Alois Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Vienna: Filser, 1929); Eng. trans. "The Quintessence of Riegl's Thought," in Richard Woodfield, ed., *Framing Formalism: Riegl's Work* (Amsterdam 2001). This essay was strongly denounced by E. H. Gombrich, however, see Ian Verstegen, "Materializing Sedlmayr," *Art History in Vienna 1856-1938*, Glasgow, Scotland, 4 October 2009.

¹³ Sedlmayr, "Die Quintessenz," xxxiii: "Der Idee und de rim wesentlichen eingehaltene Plan zu dieser Veroffentlichung stamen von Dr. Johannes Wilde in Wien. Ihm sind die Herausfebber in mehr al seiner Hinsicht zu grossem Dank verpflichtet."

¹⁴ See Evonne Levy, "Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond, 1930-1935," *Art History in Vienna 1856 to 1938*, Glasgow, Scotland, 3 October 2009, where Wilde is mentioned among other potential contributors.

¹⁵ Johannes Wilde, "The Hall of the Great Council of Florence" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 7 (1944), pp. 65-81; "The Decoration of the Sistine Chapel," *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1958): 61-81.

The main problematic for Wilde is to leave aside the analysis of the individual works for a while (Michelangelo's and Leonardo's murals in one case, and Michelangelo's in the other) and think about their situatedness. How might the layout of these spaces, especially in the Florentine case where the room was rebuilt a short time later by Vasari, affect how an artist might execute their work? In the former case, this resulted in a reconstruction of the Great Town Hall and new presuppositions about the possible size of the murals and compatibility with known drawings. This is good antiquarian research, but Wilde was motivated by particular reasons. He thought about the new context as an artist. How would an artist fill the space?

Subsequent studies have modified Wilde's scheme but not overturned its basic premise.¹⁶ Departing in a Wildean vein, and more particularly from observations of Marcia Hall, I have similarly sought some visual logic to the two frescoes. Combining Leonardo's theoretical writings in addition to Hall's suggestion that the drawings after Michelangelo's cartoon suggest he had arrived at a relief-like solution, one could argue that both artists had responded to the shallowness of the Great Council Hall and Leonardo's was probably working toward a relieflike solution as well.¹⁷

Thinking along these lines presumes an important methodological assumption: that the contemporary historian can rely on her judgment to assess artistic decisions. Without this presumption, the floating work is an indeterminate object. When size, materials and handling are not taken into account anything is possible. Any iconography can become plausible given a compelling textual source. The Vienna-Wilde take is different. The physicality or embodiment of the work dictates certain possibilities for its own execution and meaning.

Function and Imaginative Reconstruction

The basic methodological tool of Wilde's students was simple, *function*. They use it extensively and it clearly derives from Wilde's method. Function is the synchronous context in which parts work together as a whole, serving as they do the overall purpose of the activity undertaken there. This is true both of Wilde's analyses of the

¹⁶ Claire Farago, "Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*: A Study of the Exchange between Theory and Practice," *Art Bulletin* 126 (1994): 301-330 and "The *Battle of Anghiari*: A Speculative Reconstruction of Leonardo's Design Process." *Achademia Leonardi Vinci: Journal of Leonardo Studies and Bibliography of Vinciana* 9 (1996), pp. 73-86. For a reconstruction of the Windsor drawing, see among others Cecil Gould, "Leonardo's Great Battle-Piece: A Conjectural Reconstruction," *The Art Bulletin* 36 (1954), 117-29; on the reliability of Rubens' drawing, see Frank Zöllner, "Rubens Reworks Leonardo: The Fight for the Standard," *Achademia Leonardi Vinci* 4 (1991): 177-190.

¹⁷ Marcia Hall, "Classicism, Mannerism, and the Relieflike Style," *The Cambridge Companion to Raphael* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 234; Ian Verstegen, "Leonardo, Raphael and Painterly Influences on the Development of Ichnography," in Ian Verstegen and Allan Ceen, eds., *Giambattista Nolli and Rome: Mapping the City before and after the Pianta Grande* (Rome: Gangemi, 2010).

Sala di Gran Consiglio and not to mention his work on the Sistine chapel. Shearman echoes Wilde when he writes of the Julius apartments in the Vatican:

I should maintain that they [Raphael's Stanze] cannot be understood in isolation, but they must be read in the *context* of the whole papal apartment of which they form a minor part; [...] a recovery of the *functions* of these rooms can indeed yield a direct explanation of their *decoration*. For the title I chose the less elegant plural – Functions – because I wanted to draw attention to one *complication* among so many which I must pass by, which is that the purposes of the separate parts of the papal apartment are subject to confusing but not casual change.¹⁸

Here, the imagining function is close to Sedlmayr as outlined in his “Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft.”¹⁹ Therein, Sedlmayr distinguished between a first science of art history based on fact collecting and a second science of imaginative intuition. In the second, it was possible to account for “previously unexplained aspects of the permanent, objective condition of the work.”

Intuitions reveal how existing monuments hang together but also how incomplete monuments ought to be put back together. Sedlmayr cited an example of such imaginative reconstruction in Pinder's reconstruction of the Nördlingen Altar but he also had Wilde's reconstruction of the Antonello's altarpiece available to him.²⁰ No doubt, Pinder's more dramatic method appealed to him more than Wilde's chaste and exhaustive work, raising a larger issue of the anxiety of influence that Wilde may have provided to the slightly younger Sedlmayr. In any case, the common Viennese methodological mandate is there. One can follow the careers of White and Shearman and see many examples of reconstructions, most notably Shearman's of Masaccio's Pisa Altarpiece, which carried on Wilde's investigations into the rise of the *sacra conversazione*, White's on Duccio's *Maestà* and Donatello's High Altar at the Santo in Padua, and Shearman and White's joint work on the placement of Raphael's tapestries in the Sistine Chapel.²¹

Wilde's work on the structure of Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel sought to understand the chapel as a site of ritual, to lay bare the iconographic and formal arrangement of the chapel itself. Wilde's sensitivity to spatial and thematic relation of the stories to the physical space of the chapel, a room with specific illumination, etc., was a good head start for White and

¹⁸ John Shearman, *Vatican Stanze: Functions and Decoration* (London : Oxford University Press, 1972).

¹⁹ Hans Sedlmayr, “Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft,” *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschung* 1 (1930/31), 7-32; trans. in Christopher Wood, ed., *The Vienna School Reader* (Zone Books: New York, 2000).

²⁰ See Johannes Wilde, “Die ‘Pala di San Cassiano’ von Antonello da Messina,” *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 3 (1929): 57-72.

²¹ John White, “Measurement, Design and Carpentry in Duccio's *Maestà*, Part I & II,” *Art Bulletin* 55 (1973), 334-366, 547-569; “Donatello's High Altar in the Santo at Padua Part Two: The Reconstruction,” *Art Bulletin* 51 (1969), 119-141; John White and John Shearman, “Raphael's Tapestries and their Cartoons, I & II,” *Art Bulletin* 40 (1958), 193-221 and 299-323.

Shearman's later attempt to understand the placement of the tapestries commissioned of Raphael by Leo X, to be displayed on the *basamento* level (mostly) in the chancel during feast days. The trouble is that the group was dispersed during the Sack of the city in 1527. To make matters worse, once the tapestries were assembled together again, Michelangelo had already painted the altar wall, destroying the natural place for two of the tapestries, to either side of the high altar.

It was White and Shearman's conviction that the Vatican authorities were hanging the tapestries in the wrong configuration and they, like Wilde (and with his insights), brought all their knowledge of the purpose of the chapel, the iconography and natural siting of the space, to provide a reconstruction. The ten tapestries had subject matter that divided between St. Paul and St. Peter, the natural chronology that emerged from the stories themselves, and formal characteristics related to shadows, perspective, and decorative details that set each piece off from the other.

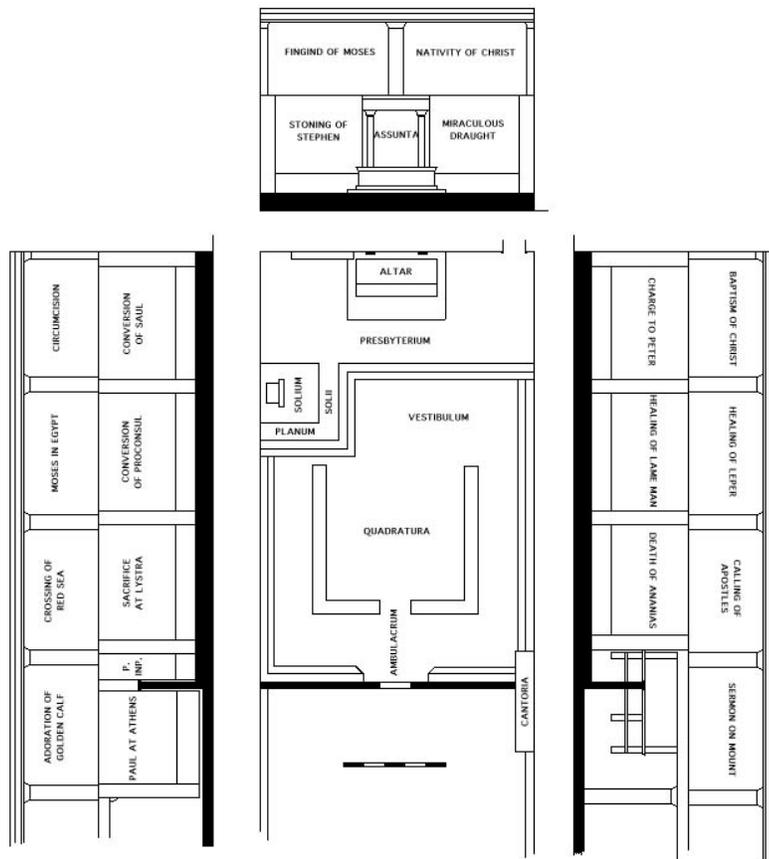


Figure 1 Figure 2 White and Shearman's reconstruction of the placement of Raphael's tapestries in the Sistine chapel.

Close examination of the original cartoons, surviving tapestries and copies after them revealed a number of details, which were vital for determining original placement (**Fig. 1**). Important were landscapes elements, sometimes continuous between scenes; perspective, which became more acute as one moved away from the high altar; and shadows that ought to be consistent with a light source on the

altar wall (shortly thereafter covered by Michelangelo's altar wall *Last Judgment*. Proof of the correctness of the scheme could be found in the image of *St. Paul Preaching in Athens*. It fits best, and anomalously, outside the chancel. However, the theme (preaching to the lay people) and the spatial setting of the scene, opening out before those assembled outside the chancel confirm its relationship to the within-chancel set as an exception to the rule.

The Viennese method as practiced especially by Sedlmayr focused on architecture and this lends itself well to monumental wall decoration (frescoes and tapestries) and the large altarpiece considered as an architectonic unit. Although colour, as such, was not a strong feature of this research, it still fit into the phenomenological program of understanding the single work of art. Because of common commitments to Gestalt theory in both Viennese *Strukturforschung* and Leipzig and Munich *Koloritgeschichte*, it is possible to see a blending of authoritative figures on an approximately common Viennese intellectual platform.

Space and the Implied Viewer

I believe it is also possible to find many shared commitments between Wilde and his students in the treatment of pictorial space. For our purposes this means primarily the approach taken by John White in his pioneering *Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (1957) and Shearman's later approach to the "engaged spectator" in *Only Connect*. It is indeed interesting that Shearman states his debt to Dvorak's approach, not in the infamous *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte* (*Art History as History of the Spirit*) but rather in the *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance* (1927).²² Shearman notes that while Wilde was more prone to leave transitive effects to the Baroque, Dvorak did justice to them.

As for Shearman, Wilde was extremely important for White's work in perspective. Wilde is thanked foremost in the dedication of *Birth and Rebirth*, "prodigal in his knowledge and friendship." It is remarkable that in a field so dominated by technical interest – witness White's contemporaries B. A. F. Carter, Maurice Pirenne, and Decio Gioseffi – White provided what became the canonical discussion of perspective in the English language with what is a very non-technical, formalist approach. Indeed, White spends the bulk of his time in the medieval period, and demands that argumentation about the new artificial perspective address needs not found previously. Indeed, he distinguishes successfully the illusion of reality from the technical use of perspective. Very sensitive to the organization of the picture plane *in addition to implied space*, White puts pictorial phenomenology before geometry. This is of course exactly what Otto Pächt had done in his "Design Principles of Fifteenth-Century Northern Painting."²³

²² Max Dvorak, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance* (Munich: Pieper, 1927).

²³ Otto Pächt, "Gestaltungsprinzipien der westlichen Malerei des 15. Jahrhunderts," *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen* 2 (1933): 75-100; "Design Principles of Fifteenth-Century Northern Painting," in Wood, *The Vienna School Reader*.

It might seem that this is contrary to Shearman's premise in *Only Connect*, for Shearman argues that we attend to a work of art's placement of the viewer whereas White often shows how it is irrelevant. But Shearman speaks just as generically as White about perspective, which locates us broadly but not with perfect accuracy. It is just that Shearman's sixteenth century examples are better at doing this than White's from the *trecento* and *quattrocento*. I will show this with the example of Donatello, discussed by both White and Shearman. In order to clarify this paradox, we have to look more closely at their respective discussions.

The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space was important for qualifying the expectation of those schooled in pure geometry that a perspective construction requires a rigid spectator at its center of projection. White presciently, and with more tangibility than Panofsky's 'philosophical' argument for perspective's conventionality, showed how most perspective projections are not (and often cannot) be seen from their points of projection.²⁴ This is true of Piero's *Resurrection*, Leonardo's *Last Supper*, and Raphael's *School of Athens*. White detailed this in especial detail for Donatello, who was aware of the advantages of artificial perspective but overrode its expectations.

The result is really a brilliant piece of Wildean method, for it seeks to understand the requirements of the image, which must balance aesthetic with perspective demands. Seeing perspective's power as a cognitive (and not illusionistic) affair, viewers have the ability to identify with the intended subject. By relaxing expectations, the artist can incorporate multiple viewpoints and allow for a mobile viewer. Issues of clarity and visual force face artists as they seek to make their pictures attractive patterns.

As an example, White discusses Donatello's altar for the Santo in Padua, for which he would later provide a convincing reconstruction. Most of the panels have a very close perspective viewing point. This was not intended to be the actual station point for a spectator but instead gives the orthogonals "the greatest possible extension" (Fig. 2).²⁵ The surfaces indicating recession into depth – the sides of the box into which figures are placed – become a compositional surface in their own right, satisfying the need for a decorative pattern from any number of angles.

²⁴ Erwin Panofsky, "Perspective als symbolische Form," *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburgs 1924/1925* (Leipzig, 1927); trans. by Christopher Wood, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Verso, 1991).

²⁵ John White, "Developments in Renaissance Perspective: II," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 14 (1951), 54.

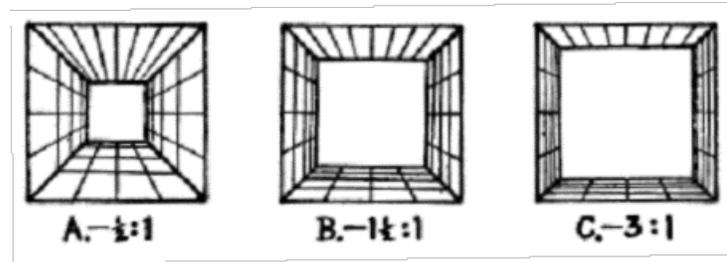


Figure 3 John White's diagram (1951) indicating the tendency to zoom the viewing point in (A & B) in order to expose more of the surface of the orthogonals, providing more surface area of pattern for the viewer.

White's discussion of points of projection that are impossible to occupy was directly influential on the work on the "robustness" of perspective by the perceptual researcher Michael Kubovy.²⁶ Kubovy noted the lack of trouble viewers have in viewing such images, and this tolerance he dubbed "the robustness of perspective." Although Kubovy's insights have been assimilated into perception science and, indeed, into art history, White's aesthetic viewpoint has not. Indeed, it can be argued that White's balancing of perspective and aesthetics delimits the proper understanding of perspective itself in the early modern period and if taken to heart perhaps would have tempered later, more skeptical accounts of perspective like that of James Elkins, which created a stark choice between poetics and perspective.

At first sight, Shearman's interest in Donatello is apparently totally contrary to White's. This is driven home by Robert Munman's monograph on optical corrections in Donatello's art, in which White's work is used to see where perspective is irrelevant, in order to underscore the contrary point that will later be cited approvingly by Shearman. A good example of such optical corrections that serve as the basis of an engaged spectator is the Pecci Tomb, a prominent part of Shearman's opening discussion in *Only Connect*.

Donatello created the Pecci tomb for Bishop of Grosseto, Giovanni Pecci. There are perspective clues within the *schacciato* tomb that favor its viewing from one particular point of view. Already noted by Panofsky, they were described in detail by Munman.²⁷ Shearman added a ritual and iconographic element to these facts: the proper viewpoint was from the high altar and the crucifix above, which perpetually reenacts a Mass of the Dead for the deceased and places him for eternal judgment.

Shearman was pleased that his reading had also been reached by Artur Rosenauer of the University of Vienna, a pupil of Pächt.²⁸ Within *Only Connect*

²⁶ Michael Kubovy, *The Psychology of Perspective and Renaissance Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

²⁷ Robert Munman, "Optical Corrections in the Sculpture of Donatello," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 75 (1985), 32-33.

²⁸ Artur Rosenauer, *Studien zum frühen Donatello – Skulptur im projektiven Raum der Neuzeit* (Wiener Kunstgeschichtliche Forschungen), Vienna, 1975, 111-113; "Bermerkungen zur Grabplatte des Pietra Cacciafuochi in San Francesco in Prato," in *Donatello-Studien. Italienische Forschungen* (Munich, 1989). A

Shearman cites other examples of Rosenauer's work, and may have even mused on his theoretical 'cousin.' Here, we have reached the point to understand where seemingly conflicting Wildean approaches have yielded different results. Shearman is interested in the image that engage spectators, and White's examples are about images that in a sense ignore them. But it is important to see that Shearman isn't interested in points of perspective projection either. Instead, he is interested in the way in which the image needs the viewer to complete it in some way. It is a new kind of image and White, true to his professional status as a medievalist, is exposing archaic needs.

Colour Phenomenology

Imaginative reconstruction requires an artistic sensitivity to what *should* be there, but the attention to what is already there was also pronounced. This is especially true for Shearman and his work on the phenomenology of colour in painting. For such insights, Shearman relied not only on Wilde but the best of German scholarship on *Koloritgeschichte*.²⁹ The dissertations of sensitive art historians like Herbert Siebenhüner, not to mention the masterpiece by Theodor Hetzer, were well known at the Courtauld.³⁰ They provided the tools for a bold move into the subjective effects of colour by Anglo-Saxon art historians. Colour is no less subject to "function" than is form. Shearman prominently called his contribution to the post-restoration volume on the Sistine Ceiling, "The Functions of Michelangelo's Colour," and explained how they were in large part a response to the conditions of visibility, illumination and decoration that Michelangelo was seeking.

Wilde's "The Decoration of the Sistine Chapel" (1958) was published a year after Shearman's dissertation and even cites already White's book, based on his dissertation. It is difficult to distinguish observation of student and teacher in this productive moment. Wilde was concerned to "look at the...works in their relation to each other as parts of the overall decoration of the same interior."³¹ Indeed, Wilde promised no radical reinterpretation of the ceiling, yet his attempt to understand the chapel as a 'formal opportunity,' served Sedlmayr's function of basing future stylistic and iconographic analysis on a sound, formal basis.

full amplification of Shearman's position has been given by Geraldine Johnson, "Activating the Effigy: Donatello's Pecci Tomb in Siena Cathedral," *Art Bulletin* 77 (1995), 445-459.

²⁹ John Gage, "Colour in Western Art: An Issue?" *Art Bulletin* 72 (1990); Verstegen, "Gestalt, Art History, and Nazism."

³⁰ Herbert Siebenhüner, *Über den Kolorismus der Frührenaissance* (Leipzig, 1935); Theodor Hetzer, *Tizian: Geschichte seiner Farbe* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1935). Shearman does not cite Mänz or Strauss, presumably because their works do not touch his subject; c.f., Harry Mänz, *Die Farbgebung in der italienischen Malerei des Protobarock und Manierismus* (Berlin: Brandel, 1934); and Ernst Strauss, *Untersuchungen zum Kolorit in der spätgotischen deutschen Malerei*, Ph. D. dissertation, Universität München, 1927.

³¹ Wilde, "The Decoration of the Sistine Chapel," 61.

Shearman's precocious dissertation on colour in the Italian Renaissance, touching importantly on the Sistine ceiling, provided the colouristic counterpart to Wilde's formalist discussion of the program. Stated strongly in his dissertation, *Developments in the Use of Colour in Tuscan Painting of the Early Sixteenth Century*, was an emphasis on a Ghirlandaesque, Tuscan tradition of "isochromatic colour composition," in the ceiling. This system, according to which broad, flat fields of colour are decoratively balanced along the picture surface, is frankly medieval in origin.³² Shearman mentions in the dissertation that he first noticed such "contrapuntal composition" when viewing Bernardino Daddi's work in the Gambier-Parry collection along with John White.³³ Shearman later softened his judgment about the Sistine to say that the pattern was not so clear-cut.³⁴ Nevertheless, it served a useful role for Michelangelo, as he pointed out of other examples of painting, in that it retained a consistently high key of brightness. This strategy was useful in such low illumination.³⁵

Shearman noted that Michelangelo, at least for the first half of the Seers painted before the ceiling was visible and the scaffolding had been installed for the second half, seems to have weakly zig-zagged across the vault by echoing a couple of colours. He observes that, beginning with Zechariah (the first Seer to be painted of them all) we can follow the apple-green of his robe to the pale-yellow/apple-green of the undergarment of the Delphic Sibyl, and from there to the pale-yellow/apple-green undergarment of the Erythraean Sibyl and finally to the simple green of the Cumaen Sibyl. Similarly, says Shearman, the yellow/brown of Zechariah's undergarment is repeated in the yellow/red-brown robe of the Delphic Sibyl, the yellow/gray robe of the Erythraean Sibyl and finally the yellow/brown robe of the Cumaen Sibyl.

Shearman points out that the effect is not found at all in the second (altar) half of the vault. But he does persist in saying that when we turn from the figure of Zechariah, which is painted with a solid apple-green robe and a very modest yellow/brown colour change (*cangiante*) for the undergarment, to that of, say, Jeremiah, which is painted with a red/yellow colour change, we have a simple change in palette, with no additional meaning attached to the choice. He says, "there is no fundamental difference between his intentions in a polychrome sequence...and that of a single-colour saturation change."³⁶ This is a strong argument that identifies what I might call (with some sympathy) Shearman's artistic reductivism, that is, a tendency to explain features according to a primitive logic that overrides social, theological and political contingencies.

³² John Shearman, *Developments in the Use of Colour in Tuscan painting of the early sixteenth century*, Ph.D. dissertation, Courtauld Institute, 1957; c.f., "Isochromatic Colour Composition," in Marcia Hall (ed.), *Colour and Technique in Renaissance Painting* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1987), pp. 151-60.

³³ Shearman, *Developments in the Use of Colour*, vol. II, 64, n. 11.

³⁴ John Shearman, "The Function of Michelangelo's Colour," in Carlo Pietrangeli (ed.), *The Sistine Ceiling: A Glorious Restoration* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), pp. 80-9.

³⁵ Shearman, *Developments*, vol. II, 91, n. 93.

³⁶ John Shearman, "The Function of Michelangelo's Colour," p. 86.

Shearman has made the legitimate point that since yellow is uniformly high in value it is the most natural to colour change with another hue that can differ in intensity (as a whitened yellow for highlights or a blackened yellow for shadows could not). This is certainly true in at least one sense, because numerically considered, yellow/red colour changes *are* those most commonly found in fresco painting from the time of Giotto on. However, even in Jeremiah it seems that we must admit that the effect of the yellow (which, incidentally, is *not* consistently used as the highlight but only for the upper body) gives the effect of intense illumination of the figure, at least at the shoulder where it is found.

In spite of Shearman's strong statements about the equivalence of solid and changed colours, which is further discussed next, it is very interesting that when Shearman returned to the topic of isochromatic colour and looked around for other precedents, the two that he found were distinctly Viennese. First, he noted the "brilliant pages" of observations on contrapuntal colour by Otto Pächt in the *St. Alban's Psalter*.³⁷ Secondly, he had found a useful discussion of such effects in stained glass of Chartres by the pupil of Sedlmayr, Eva Frodl-Kraft.³⁸

Closely related to his theory of latent isochromatic colours in Renaissance art are Shearman's observations on colour-changes or *cangianti*. He then entered into a debate with Edward Maeder on the overall importance of Michelangelo's *cangianti*.³⁹ According to Edward Maeder, who has singled out the ancestors in his arguments, colour changes are used to make these Eastern ancestors of Christ more exotic. We have already encountered the historical fact that colour changes have been used to represent shot-silk, but Maeder goes on to suggest that since this was most commonly available from the Near East, it would carry Oriental associations and therefore would serve ideally for the ancestors.

Maeder's argument is strongest when we remember the lack of colour changes on the narrative scenes on the ceiling. Its absence there implies that Michelangelo could have played on these associations at this lower level. The problem arises, however, with the Seers. If about half (as I suggested) are dressed in colour changes, does this mean that half are dressed in silks and the other half not (and also that Jonah, as Shearman pointed out, implausibly must have just emerged from the fish's mouth dressed in pretty silks)?

On the other hand, Shearman is no better off. If we look at the ancestors only, it is easy to imagine that in painting them Michelangelo used the colour changes simply to build forms rather than to suggest something extrinsic to the picture. But we simply must take the use of colour changes in other architectural levels into account. We must raise the old objection about the lack of colour changes on the upper vault section and their inadequacy for depicting flesh. Shearman's essentialism is at work here again, which can be seen in his snappy and humorous

³⁷ Otto Pächt, *St. Alban's Psalter* (London, 1960), 105, 111ff.

³⁸ Eva Frodl-Kraft, *Die Glasmalerei* (Vienna and Munich, 1970), 112.

³⁹ Edward Maeder, "The Costumes Worn by the Ancestors of Christ," in Carlo Pietrangeli (ed.), *The Sistine Chapel: A Glorious Restoration* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).

response to the challenge that if *cangiantismo* is so useful, then it should appear everywhere, including rocks. Shearman of course replied that in the Salimbeni brothers frescoes in Urbino, rocks are indeed rendered with *cangianti*!

Here Marcia Hall's arguments relating to *contrapposto* are enlightening.⁴⁰ Hall notes that although the ancestors of Christ could point to a noble ancestry, traditionally they did not know their part in making possible the birth of the Son of God. According to Hall, Michelangelo has accomplished this with his *disegno*, which emphasizes the ordinariness, ugliness and often the bewilderment of the ancestors. However, even though they seem caught up in their affairs, they radiate so to speak with the colour changes which signal to us their chosen role in history. Thus colour and *disegno* work, once again, in a dialectical *contrapposto*, one supplementing the other where the other is lacking and vice versa. This argument seems to work better than that of either Maeder or Shearman. Maeder is led to the difficult conclusion of suggesting that half of the Seers are clothed in silk while the other half are not. But Shearman is also led to the problem of the absence of colour change on the ceiling, proper.

What Shearman called 'tonal unity' was the Renaissance principle that superseded *cangiantismo* and other forms of medieval absolute colouration. This is a central feature of his dissertation and was at the centre of his classic paper, "Leonardo's Use of Colour and Chiaroscuro."⁴¹ Shearman noted that the absolute colour aesthetic was increasingly unappealing toward the end of the fifteenth century. It was Leonardo's task to find ways to balance the differential brightness of different hues by controlling each separately, in order to achieve an approximately equal brightness, or *unione*. Leonardo accomplished this by moving his palette toward monochrome. Here, interestingly, matters of visibility are still important and Shearman used evidence of optical physiology to argue that the Louvre version of Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks*, which appears to have a much less prominent Mary, would assume its proper centrality because the change from cone to rod vision in low illumination – the Purkinje effect – assures that the blue stands out.

Shearman's insights have been followed up by James Ackerman, Marcia Hall and Janis Bell. Hall noted that Shearman had slightly neglected the gradual solutions toward tonal unity achieved by Flemish glazing, Alberti's system of shading with black (so-called 'down' modelling) and other pre-Leonardesque systems.⁴² White, too, had mentioned the problem of tonal unity in his discussion of Filippo Lippo, and criticizes Hetzer on the fact that he underestimates the extent to which *quattrocento* painters achieved this.⁴³ Shearman's approach is vindicated to

⁴⁰ Marcia Hall, *Color and Meaning: Practice and Theory in Renaissance Painting* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁴¹ John Shearman, "Leonardo's Use of Colour and Chiaroscuro," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 25 (1962): 13-47.

⁴² Marcia Hall, "From Modeling Techniques to Color Modes," in Marcia Hall (ed.), *Color and Technique in Renaissance Paintings, Italy and the North* (Locust Valley: Augustin, 1987); *Color and Meaning*.

⁴³ White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, 175.

the degree that Filippino Lippi or Botticelli did not carry on this intermediate phase of experimentation.

Other debate has centred on Shearman's insistence that Leonardo's goal was, after all, monochrome. Reactions to a number of conservation studies has been mixed, with some showing evidence of a full palette of colours and others showing the use of strong black underpainting. The most important development has been the exploration of the *unione* mode of colouring as a general feature of High Renaissance painting, both in oil and fresco.⁴⁴ Shearman's evidence showed Leonardo pursuing tonal unity by two means, *sfumato* and "chiaroscuro," that is, a monochromatic equalization of tone. Marcia Hall has shown that both were pursued quite separately to achieve the same aim, one the blurring of outlines for the merging of tonal qualities and the second a more controlled equalization. Both of these aims were pursued by painters knowledgeable of Leonardo's example, most notably Andrea del Sarto and Correggio. The second aim was pursued in isolation by Raphael. By formalizing the particular qualities of what she has come to identify as modes, Hall has been able to expand Shearman's lead to explain the suitability of different colour styles to different contexts.

Conclusion

It has been the aim of this article to demonstrate the important similarity of art historical method in John White's and John Shearman's work by invoking the method of their common teacher, Johannes Wilde. By defining the basics of a Viennese approach to art historical material grounded in the object and its relation to its immediate context (function), I have tried to show how these two British art historians, trained at the Courtauld in London, carried on an essentially Viennese method. This demonstration shows both the surprising coherence and power of their seminal art historical work.

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⁴⁴ On *unione*, see James Ackerman, "On Early Renaissance Color Theory and Practice," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 35 (1980): 11-44; Hall, *Color and Meaning*; Janis Bell, "Color and Chiaroscuro," in Marcia Hall (ed.), *Raphael's School of Athens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 85-113.

Ian Verstegen White and Shearman's Viennese Art Historical Method

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