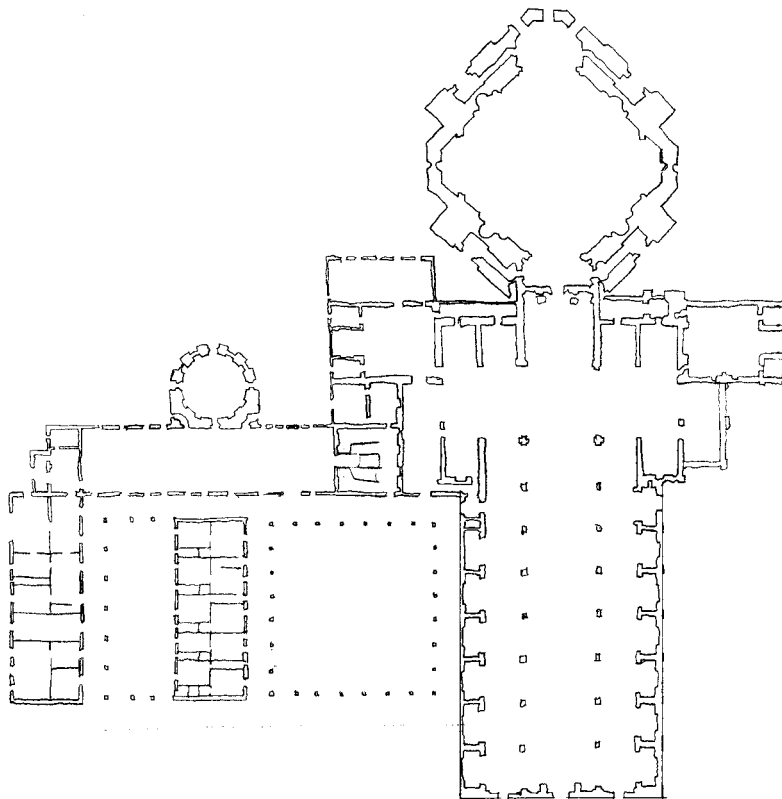


Laurentian Piccola Libreria

This design focuses on architectural meaning. The project is a rare books room at San Lorenzo, an addition to Michelangelo's Laurentian Library. It is tested against multiple readings of Michelangelo's sketches for such a room and the Laurentian Library as it was built. The whole, is a play between the vocabulary established in Michelangelo's time with a vocabulary that was not possible then. The design is also rooted in an idea about the relation of books to architecture found in Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*. An attitude is taken by the architect towards the book and the design reflects this in many ways. The legibility of such things is of interest. How or in what ways can the occupant/experiencer of this place read the ideological underpinnings of the space?



"My definition of architecture is very simple:
architecture is the art
of making the superfluous necessary.
And building and shelter is the art
of making the necessary superfluous.
We have no architecture today
because we only believe in the necessary,
in the practical,
in the immediacy of things.


Any problem, big or little,
requires a great humility-to let it
tell you what it wants,
how it should be resolved.
It will develop from its own inner concept,
which must be listened to and
understood.

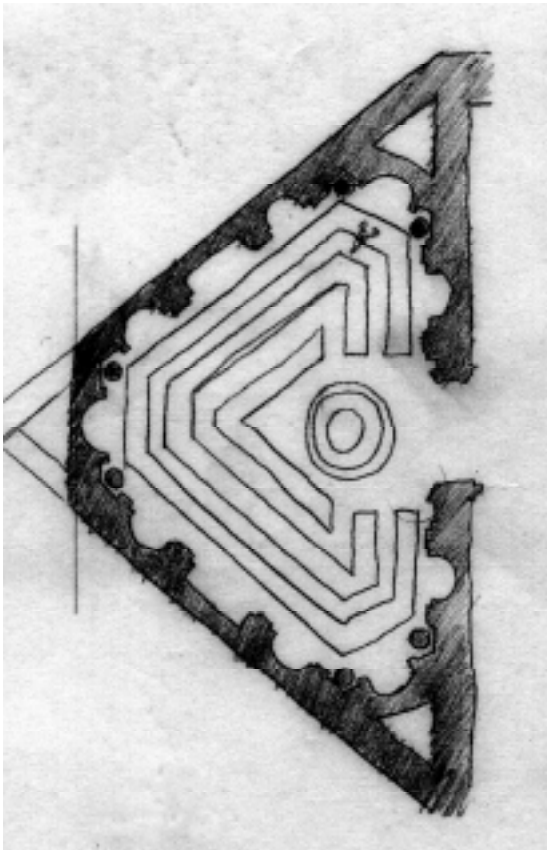
This is the first ideological building
in our time.
It is not a symbolic building at all.
It is neither a woman's breast,
nor an onion, nor a jar.
The shrine comes from its inner concept,
which has grown into a structure.
It is the first building anywhere today
that in its totality and in every detail
is related to its own basic ideology."

Frederick J. Kiesler from "Shrine of the Book"

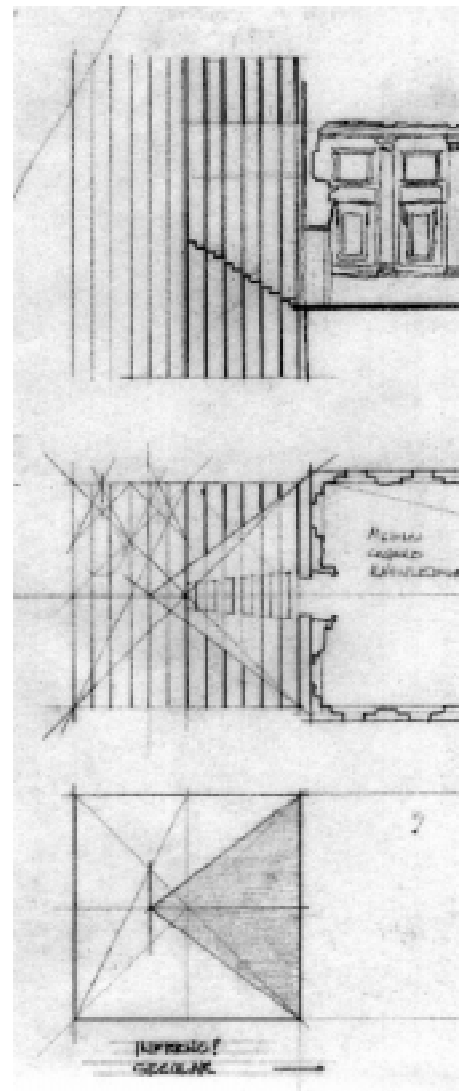
Left: Existing plan of San Lorenzo, Florence,
Italy

Order is offered in the overlapping of multiple systems. The first system is found in Michelangelo's sketches for the building, created in 1525. The second system is, in part, derived from the sketches, but considered in pure geometric terms. The third is an architectural idea that was first seen in the "suburban home", a modern wall architecture expressed with a purity not found in the former project.

Below, we can see Michelangelo's initial formal response. The form is based on the organization of the Medici family crest, six red pills in a triangular arrangement . The form is echoed in the ceiling plan and in section. The first wall plane is opened in the proportion of the reading room. An analysis of the triangle reveals that it may be based on the mason's square (right).



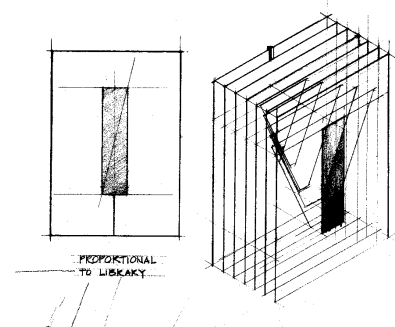
In this instance the wall opposes the structural bearing of Roman wall architecture or the platform framed house. Here, in the Piccola Libreria, the wall is freed from its structural duties. Michelangelo's Ricetto begins this process, disengaging the columns from the wall, yet enveloping them within the wall, using them for structure.

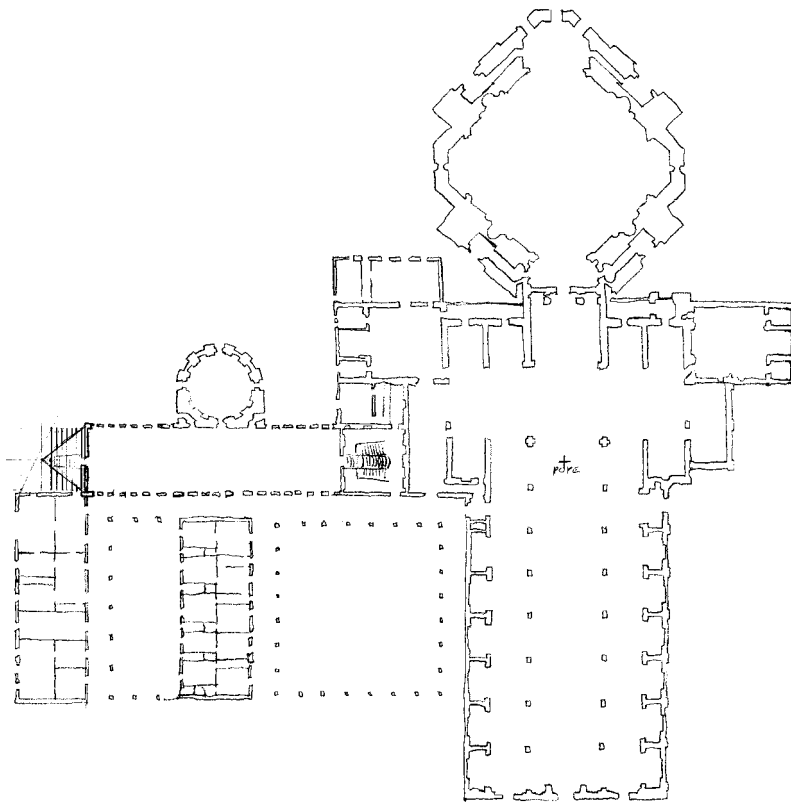


Above: Initial geometric idea for the Laurentian addition

Left: Drawing of a preliminary sketch by Michelangelo for the piccola libreria

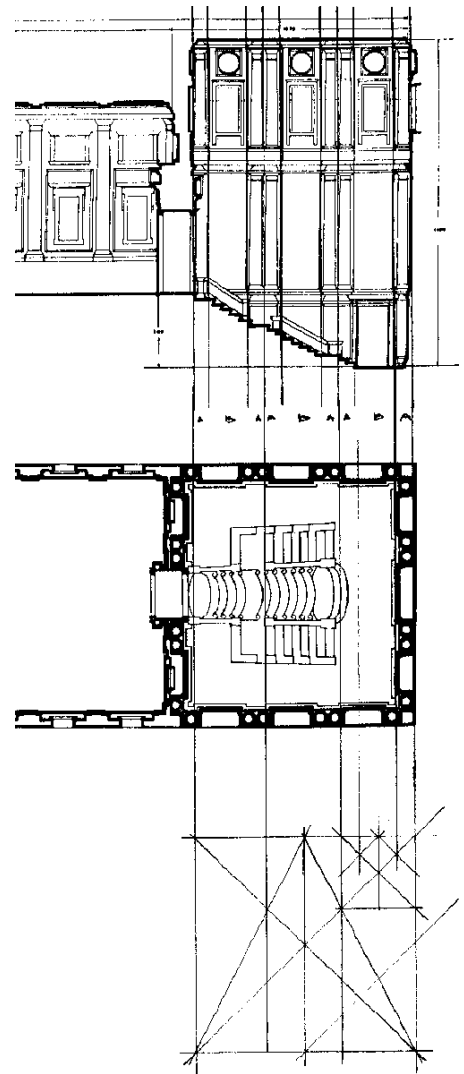
Below: Conceptual design drawing, elevation and axon



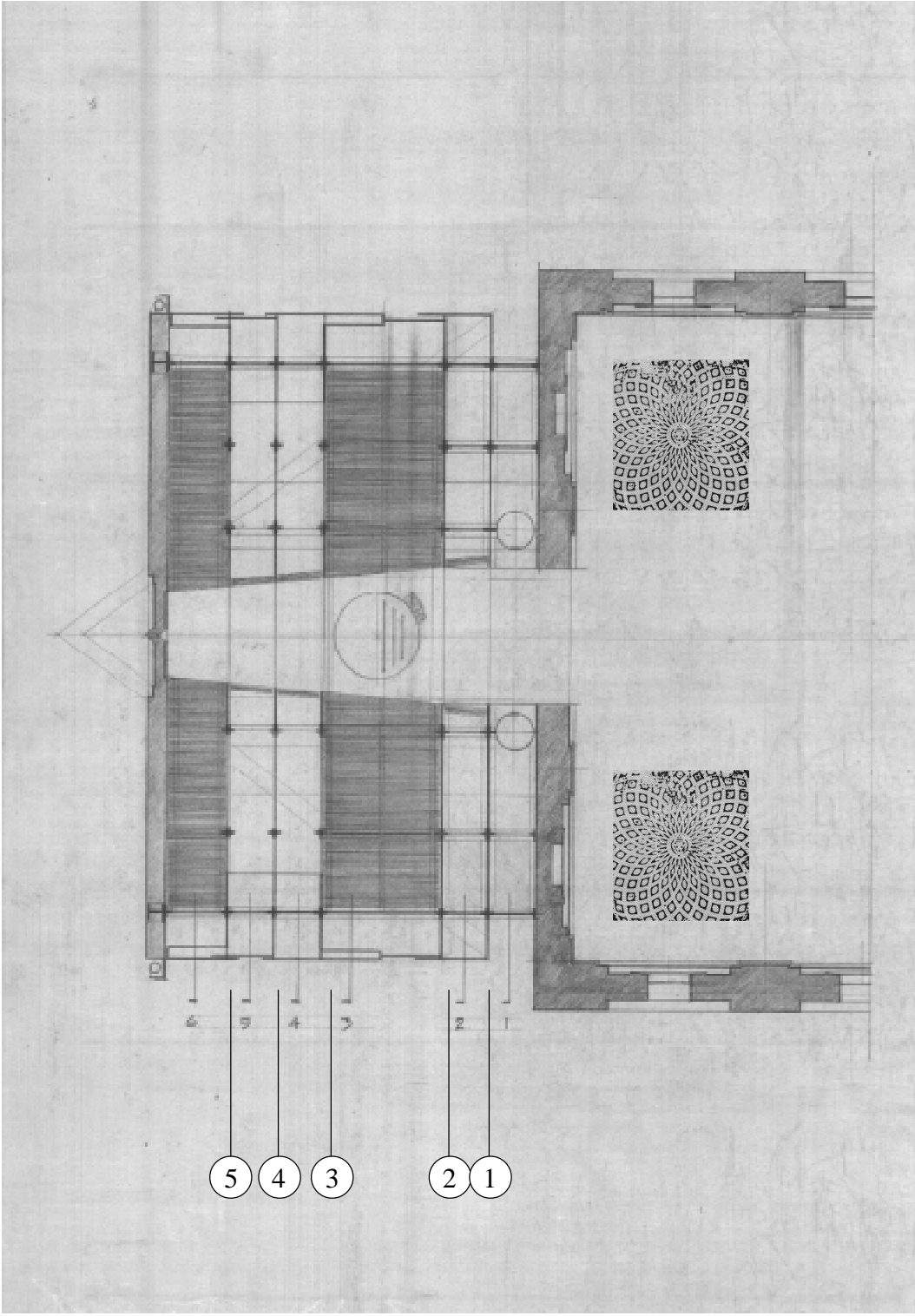
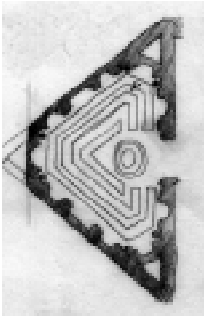


Left: Plan of San Lorenzo with preliminary plan of "piccola libreria".

Below: Geometric analysis of Michelangelo's Ricetto.

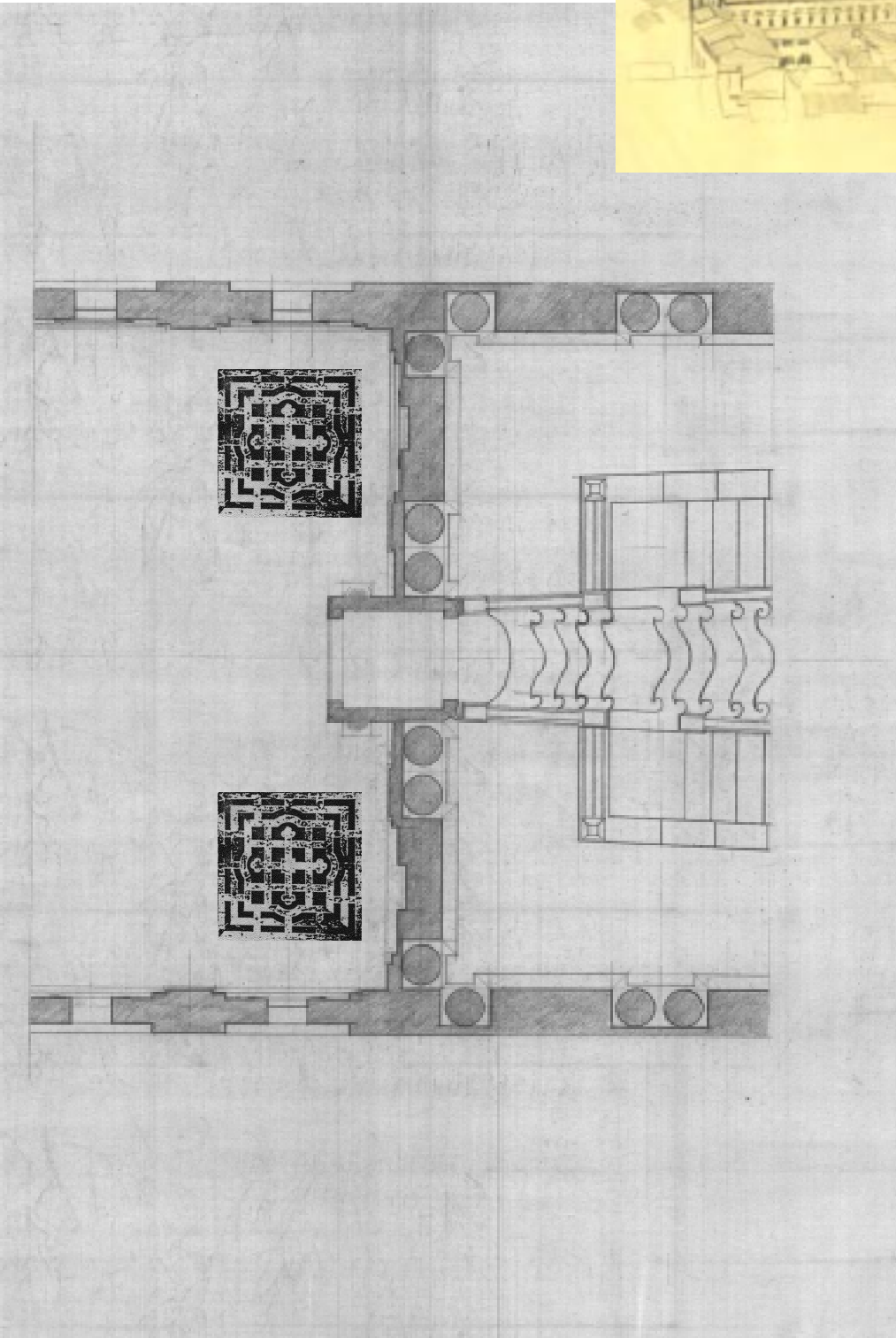


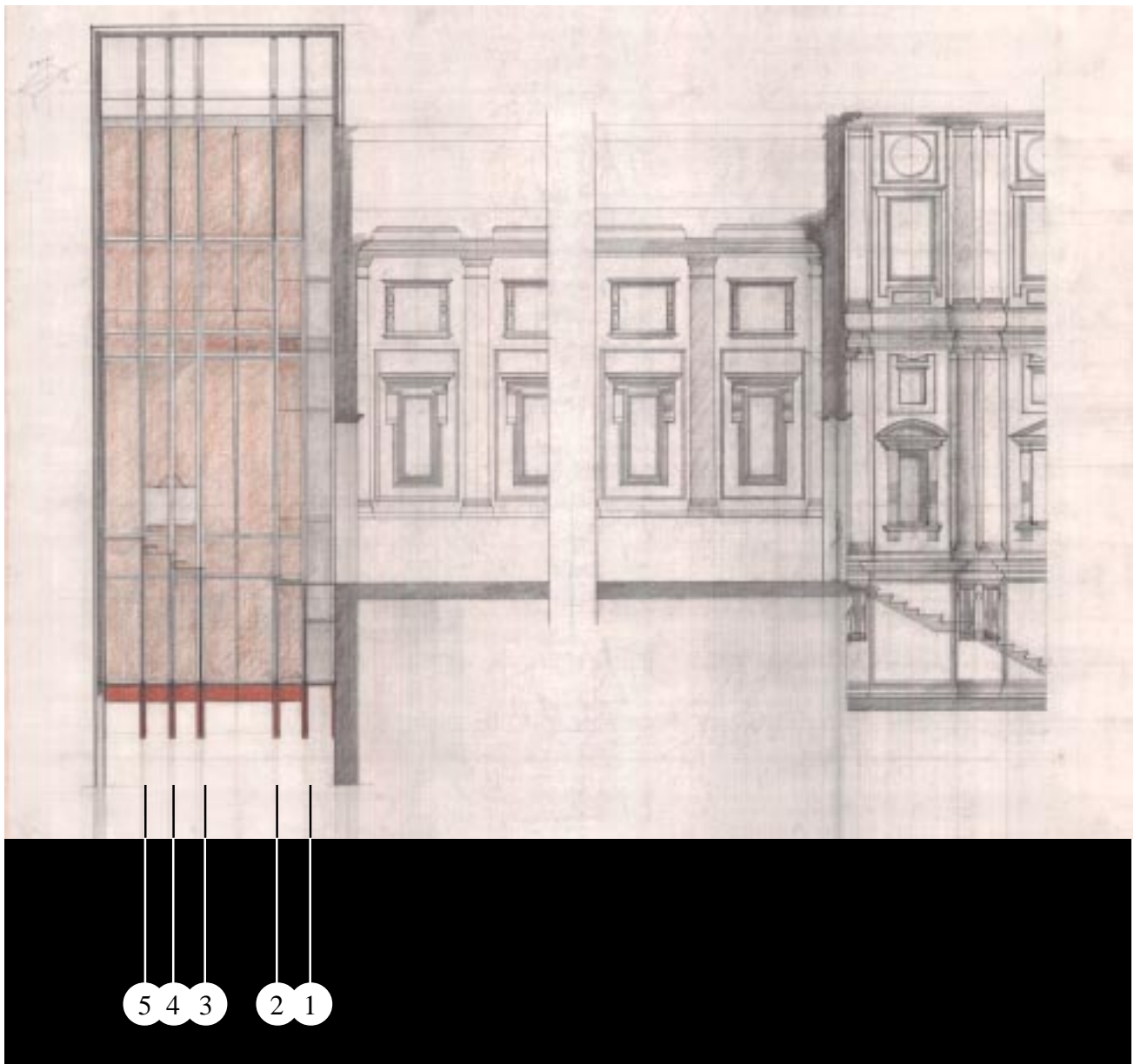
As the wall architecture developed the similarity of the addition with the Ricetto forced another look at the rhythms of the space. The regular a:b:a:b rhythm of the Reading room and preliminary design for the book room was ineffective for the addition's vertical orientation. The final wall placement is derived from the rhythms and proportions of the Ricetto, following the analysis at right. The analysis reveals an a:b:a:a:b:a:a:b:a rhythm between wall and column in the Ricetto. The underlying geometry of the space is a product of another age, based primarily upon the geometries of the mason's square and Michelangelo's proportion.



Pope panel

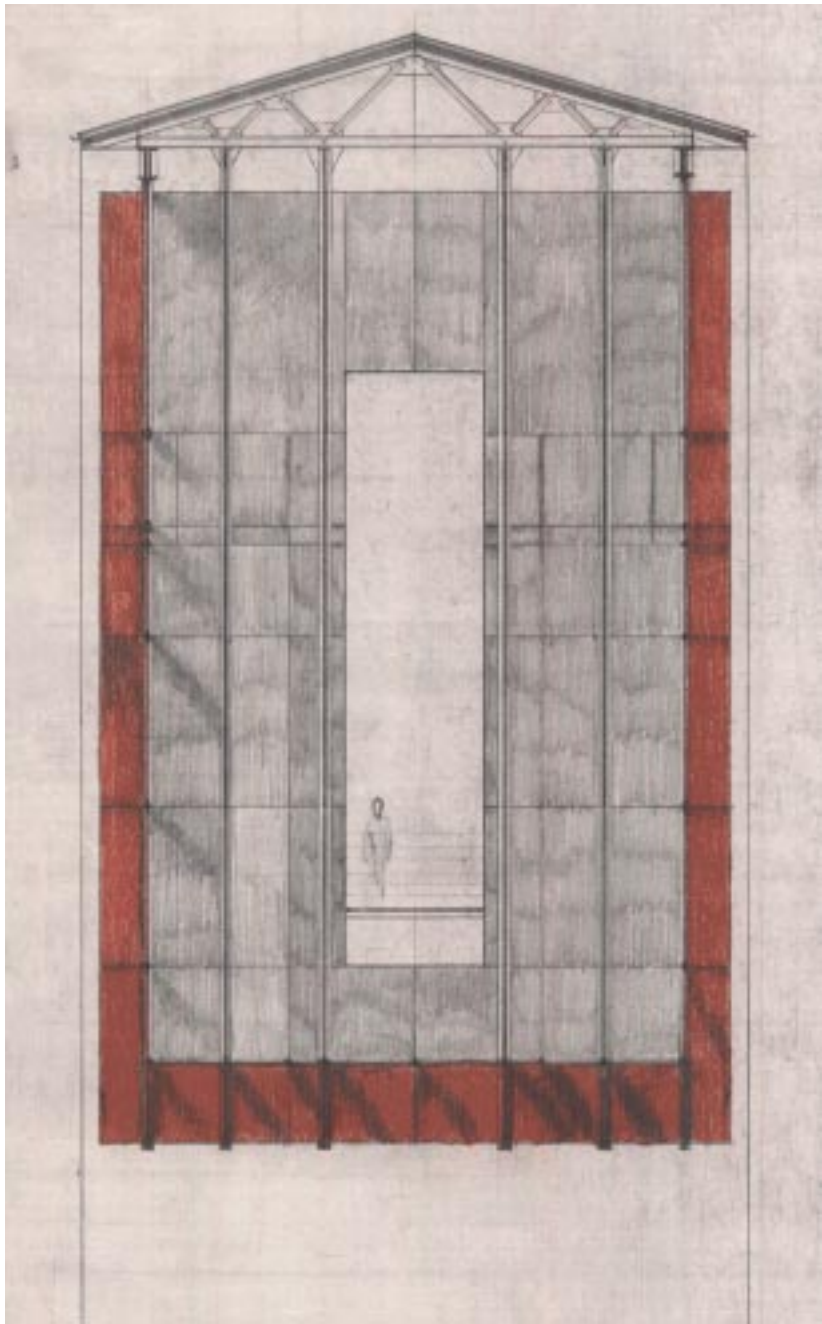
Riccetto



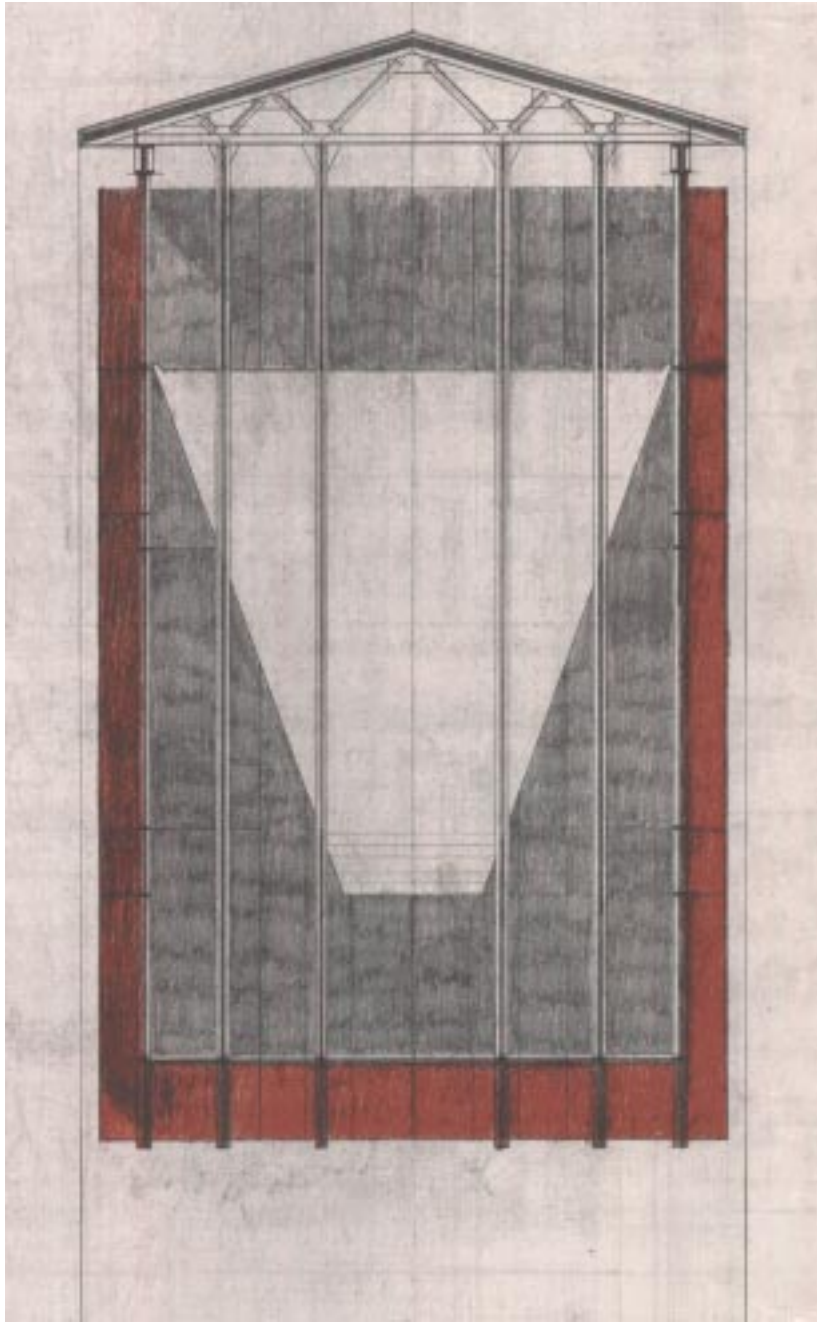


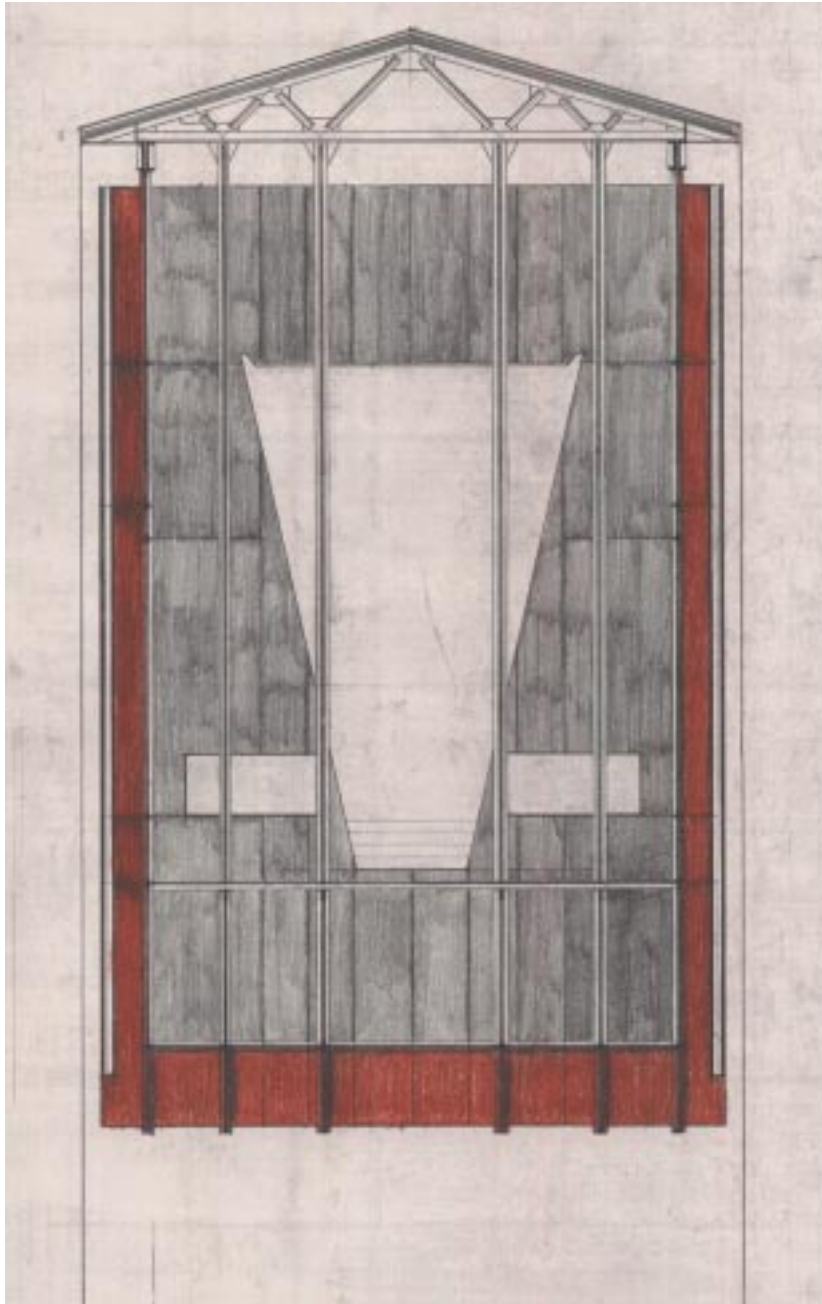
Ideological and symbolic relationships were held in a more immediate reference system based on Michelangelo's. The relationships to other Descendent works are manifested in a pure conception of the architectural idea of the parallel walls (Suburban Home). A far more ideological view toward geometry, proportion and rhythm is in place. The project was a direct Descendent of the 3 Architects, Michelangelo, in large part, was the reference, becoming a client of sorts. This building is also a descendent of Walter Pichler's work in its sensitivity and attitude. The Architecture represents a return, for me, to the kinds of thinking I was able to infuse into two projects in 1994 as an undergraduate at Kent. Since then, things have tended to become increasingly convoluted. But this remains more focused and ideologically rooted.

Meanwhile, the structure of the building revealed a complete reversal of the Renaissance methods of building. Not only had the wall lost its presence as a structural element but, bearing gave way to hanging.

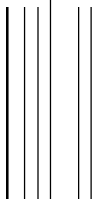


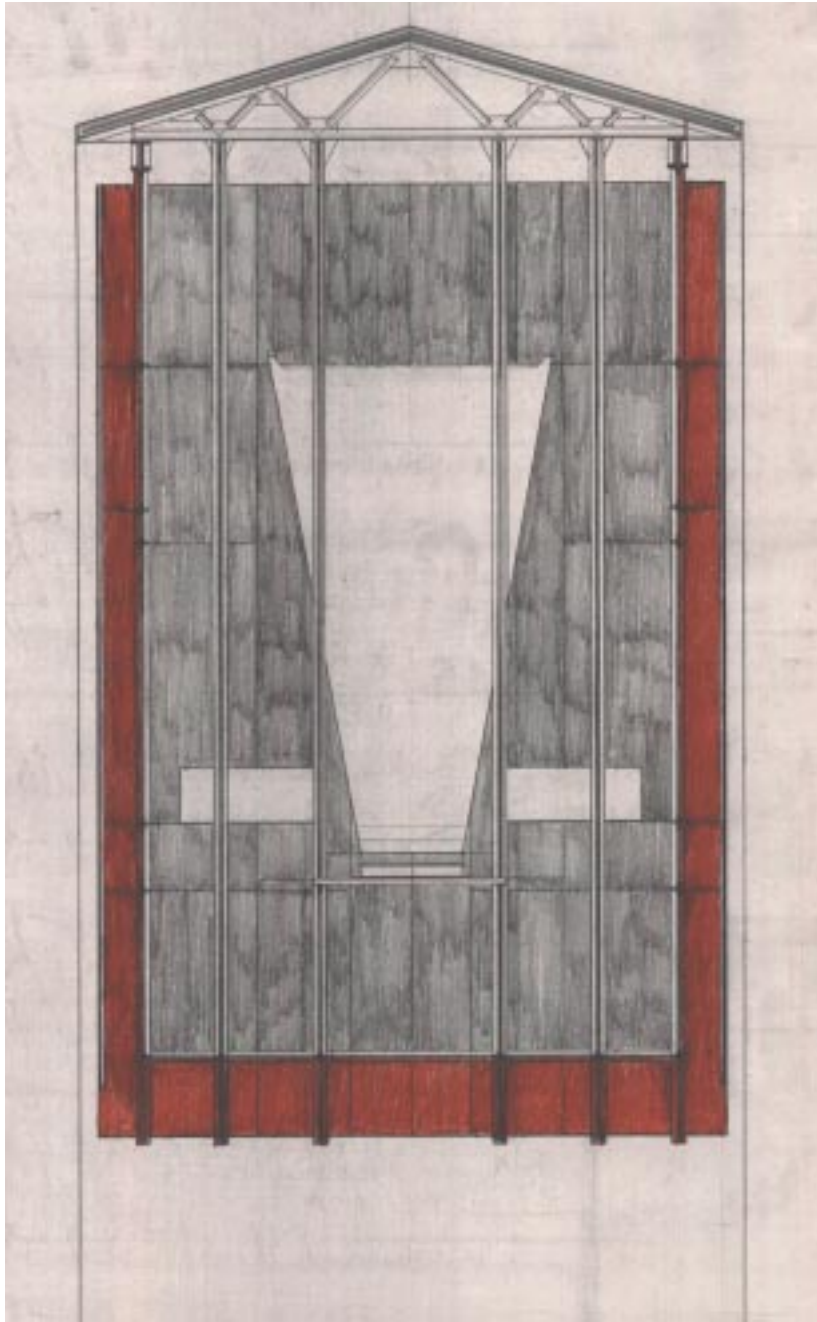
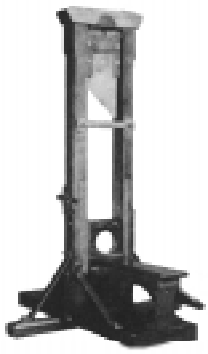
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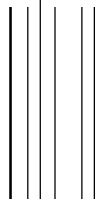


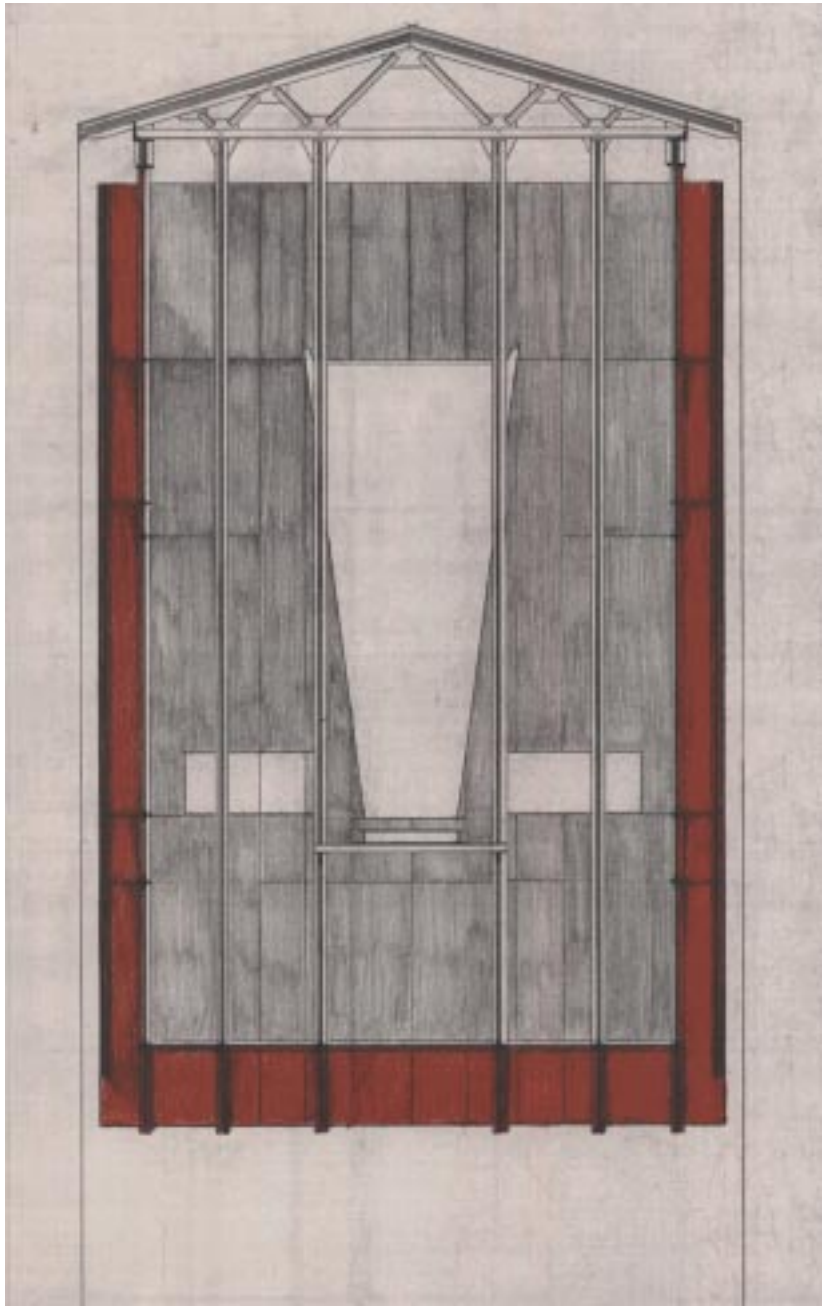
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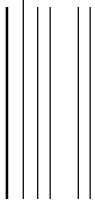


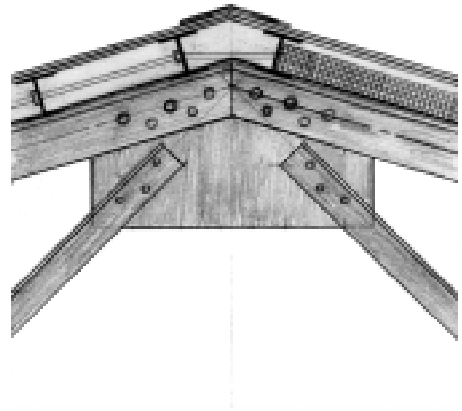
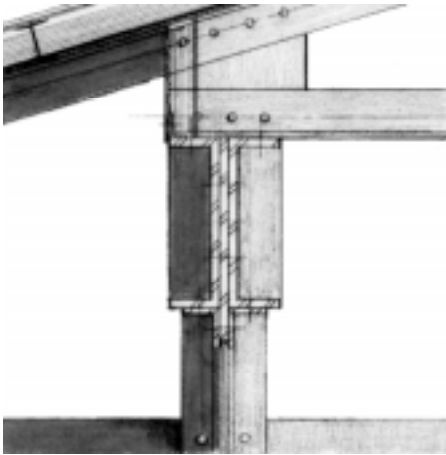
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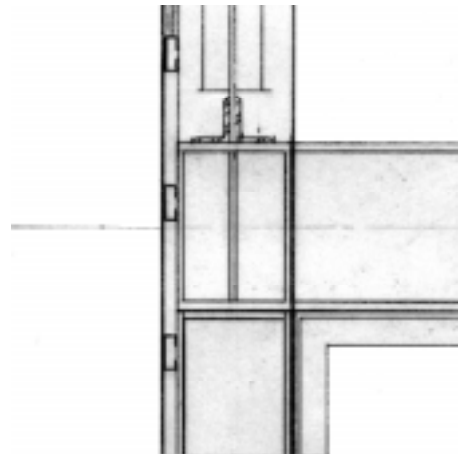
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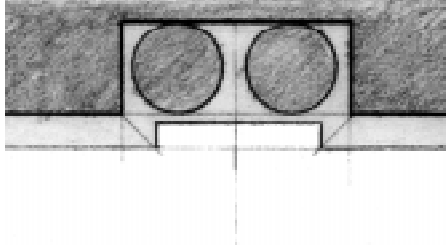




Construction detail drawings.

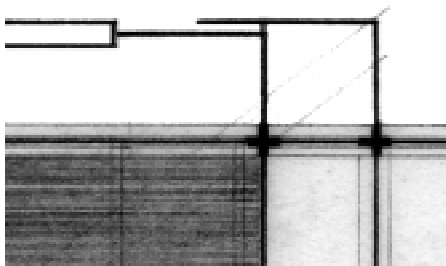
These construction details of the steel connections are less charged ideologically, at least in reference to the symbolic context of the Michelangelo's Laurentian. Their charge, however, is in the clear and honest answer to the material resistance offered in a steel building of this sort. There is a strong regard for the forces inherent in the construction. This still holds reference to Michelangelo's own approach to architecture. The gusset plate reveals the forces of tension in a way analogous to the column offering the weight of bearing in its capital and base.



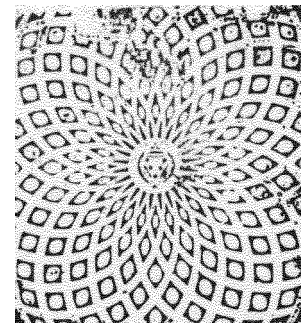
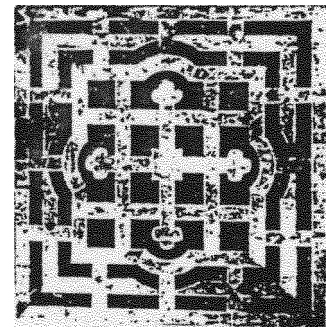


The columns of the Riccetto have been the subject of a great number of essays with various readings of the column placement. The placement has no Vitruvian precedent, and is, therefore, Mannerist, yet was found in ancient architecture. Each column is carved from an individual stone; they are not made of the same material as the stuccoed masonry wall. They are independent of the wall. The column does not touch the wall from the side, only the top and bottom, where it gathers and then disperses its load. Their function serves the wall, but they are not a part of it. The column, again, becomes an element of architecture. In the Riccetto Michelangelo gave the column the weight it had been missing.

Michelangelo's columns are round in plan. In the formal/geometric progression of the squares in the floor of the Reading Room one may read a progression from the divine to the secular. The first of the fifteen floor designs is the divine, it is located at the Riccetto end of the room, the last, appears before entrance to the Piccola Libreria. The divine is represented in a cross axial geometry, the secular is a repetitive circular arrangement. Michelangelo did not have the technology to use cruciform columns, yet his use of round columns in the divine end of the progression is intentional, for there were other options. A question is posed in using cross axial hanging columns in the addition. Is this reversal implied in Michelangelo's Riccetto through his use of the ideal secular form (circle) for the columns? Is it only right that the divine form (cruciform) hold up the secular books room? The plan view below shows the built up angles that form the cross axial arrangement, akin to Mies Van der Rohe's columns.

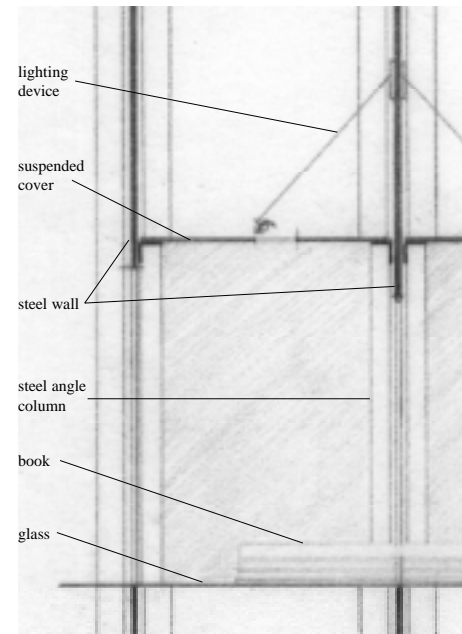
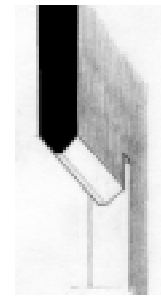
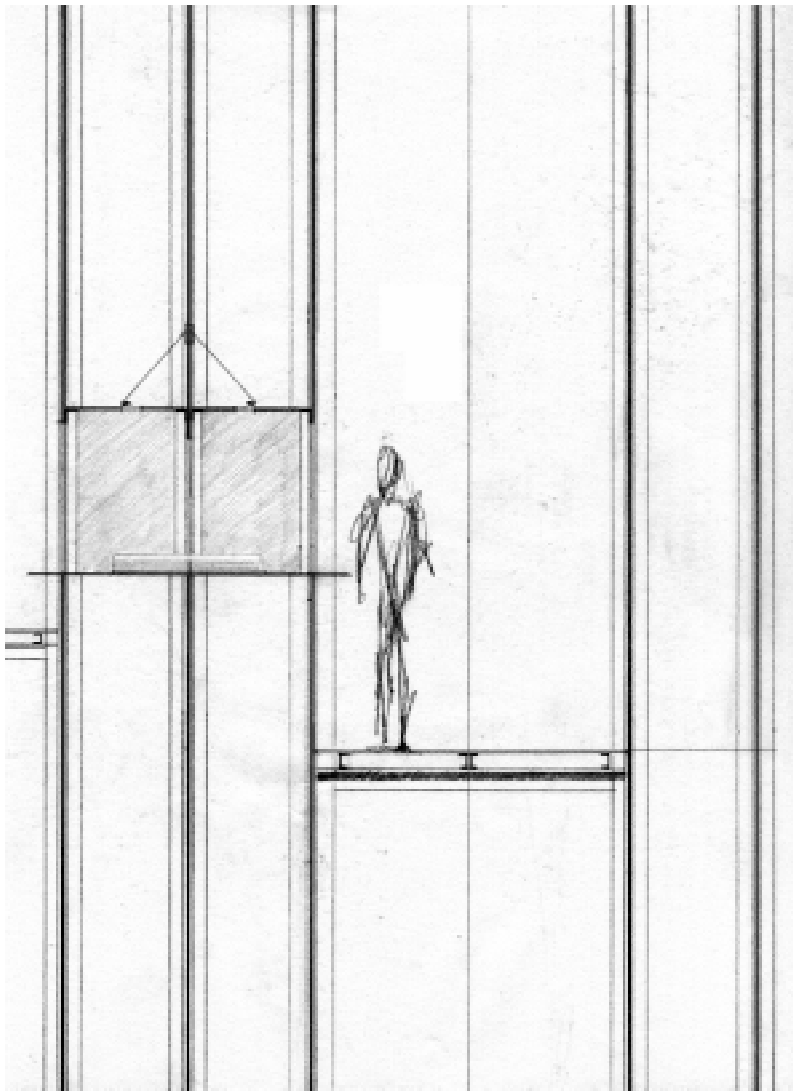


Papal panel #1



Medici panel #15

Floor panels in the Laurentian Library Reading Room. From *The Vice Versa of Painting and Architecture: Michelangelo's work in the Sistine Chapel and the Laurentian Library*. Ben Nicholson



“Architecture. It is born of the most powerful thoughts. For men it will be a compulsion.”

The program is limited to the incarceration of two books at any given moment. The books lie flat on planes of glass. Above, a wall is locked in a threatening position, suspended like a guillotine, having been cut slightly lower than walls to either side. Far below, the ground may be seen to either side of that center wall. The book is held tenuously over a space for reading that the architecture threatens to destroy.

The book is dimly lit, until one approaches, then it is allowed slightly more illumination. It is a hard life for the architecture, few will seek its light. The architecture fears the books that have attempted to take its power, its provocative spirit. This architecture is revenge, there are many readings of this architecture. Now, the book will fear. The word is unable to kill the master of all arts.

The hard attitude of the Laurentian project is in reference to an attitude toward the book developed from a reading of Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. In the words of the archdeacon in the novel “This will kill that. The book will kill the edifice.” The meaning of those words is manifold, at one level it is a notion of the fundamental change in the way the ideas of mankind are spread. The mode, method or art of communication of one generation would be replaced by another. The printing press or printing was to destroy architecture. Here architecture fights back. Attitude is the success of this project.

