



Studies for Haman. Teylers Museum, Haarlem
(Pierluigi De Vecchi, *Michelangelo*)

THE MALE AUDIT: AURAL ACCESS IN THE ART AND LIFE OF MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI

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The word *ancones* ... corbels, comes from a word that basically means elbow or any limb that bends or embraces. Vitruvius uses *ancones* eight times, but he also indicates the same architectural element with other words that refer to curved body parts. Thus in 4.6.4 he gives *parotides*, ear pieces, as a synonym for it. And in the example I give from Richard Morris Hunt, the ear shape is pronounced. The three Michelangelesque guttae that hang from the lobe function as carrings.

—George Hersey, *The Lost Language of Classical Architecture: Speculations on Ornament from Vitruvius to Venturi*

*Non mirin con iustitia i tuo sant' ochi
Il mie passato, e 'l gastigato orechio
Non tenda a quello il tuo braccio seuro*

*With justice mark not Thou, O Light Divine,
My fault, nor hear it with Thy chastened ear:
Neither put forth that way Thy arm severe.*

—Michelangelo, 1550 (trans. William Wordsworth)

Finding myself in what appears to be an open field—the aural approach to Michelangelo is not mainstream—it is tempting to throw caution to the winds and boldly assert that consideration of aural relationships is the key to Michelangelo's figural compositions; and, further, employing Liebert's psychoanalytic approach, to suggest that Michelangelo's life-work is strongly linked to aural stances he adopted in early life.¹ Depiction of the ear as an element of the body system is certainly not a high priority subject in Michelangelo scholarship. Indeed, Frederick Hartt expresses surprise to find a drawing of an ear in the centre of a sheet of drawings, *Studies for the crucified Haman*.²

Few studies of the ear for its own sake have survived.³ Yet Michelangelo drew, painted and sculpted ears as part of the body system, thousands of times. I am only at the brink of being precise about the various ways he did so, and of drawing conclusions therefrom.⁴ Maybe this has already been done, with observation of the various ear types of particular models and purposes. Such studies could perhaps clarify dates, identities, and aspects of Michelangelo's emotional life. This was how I began, seeking the identity—foolishly, Hartt warns, for lack of sufficient data—of the red chalk drawing at the Ashmolean, Oxford, *Young man in profile with earring and head gear*.⁵

It could be that Michelangelo made use from memory of a depressingly limited range of observation of the ear. This assumption is implied in the lack of scholarship on the subject, combined with the notion that he was concerned only with ideal forms. Nevertheless circumstances that prompted singular study of the ear may be crucial for clarifying certain issues. There are hints of this. Yet Michelangelo's work is sufficiently vast to make superficial, premature conclusions selective and risky.

Note

All images from Charles de Tolnay, *Michelangelo* vol. 5 *The Final Period*, unless otherwise noted.

1. Robert S. Liebert, *Michelangelo: A Psychoanalytic Study of his Life and Images* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), Part One. Liebert's two-fold purpose is to reconstruct Michelangelo's inner life, and to explore the contribution of psychoanalysis to understanding the meaning of Michelangelo's art. He argues that Michelangelo's profound sense of deprivation at the loss of his mother (wet nurse first two years, death of mother when aged six years), with its associated terror of the void, caused him to transfer his need to the image of a powerful, caring male, viz. Herculean male nudes, patrons as paternal figures, and idealised youths endowed with tender qualities; and that Michelangelo's yearning and pain could not be extinguished nor satisfied by the sequence of heroic figures he created.
2. Frederick Hartt, *The Drawings of Michelangelo* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 84; fig. 92 *Studies for the Crucified Haman* (1511). "At the extreme lower left the fingers of the right hand are quickly contoured, and the centre of the sheet, surprisingly, is occupied by a beautiful analysis of the ear."
3. In addition to the *Haman* sheet Hartt gives *Sketches of heads and features* (1504?). He links the eye and brow to *David* and dwells on the mouth and eyes. He does not comment on the ear detail. A third study of an ear is found in *Young woman holding a mirror* (1532-34?). The ear is barely legible in Hartt's reproduction, and he does not mention it. The only other study of an ear, apart from heads, that I know of is given by Beck, but this may have been cropped from a larger drawing. James Beck, *Michelangelo: A Lesson in Anatomy* (London: Phaidon, 1975), 30; esp. fig. 5, *Study of an ear*.
4. Differentiation might include relative size; set of ear to head, forward or back, flat, inclined outward, outline of shell, round, long, pointed, square, slanted forward or backward, broad, narrow; acutely ribbed or flat ribbed; and so on. The Sistine ceiling includes ears with square and oblique slanting outlines, and with strong broad rib structures. The 1520s drawings suggest Perini as having ears with a high rounded shell, with finer, acute ribs within. The Cavalieri period of the 1530s indicate a high pointed ear.
5. Hartt, 20. Michelangelo's *Young man with earring* shows strong similarity with Francesco di Giorgio's outline drawing of a head in profile superimposed on a classical entablature. Apart from the clarity of the



facial outline of Michelangelo's head, and an increased clarity of the ear in particular, the diagonal brim of the headdress with trailing ribbons and peak, like the raking eagle cornice of a pediment with its corona, corresponds to the band and crown of curling hair in Francesco di Giorgio's drawing. Both diagonals triangulate the brow and ear with the chin. George Hersey, *The Lost Language of Classical Architecture: Speculations on Ornament from Vitruvius to Venturi* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), 85; plate 38, Francesco di Giorgio Entablature from the Saluzziano Codex, folio 211.

6. I find this first impression difficult to recapture. There are detailed studies of heads, such as that for the *Doni Madonna* (1503-4) which only faintly indicate the ear. *Study for the head of Dawn* (1520-21) gives the outline more weight with rapid hatching within but no indication of the forked rib structure. Countless small figural studies are not concerned with the ear in detail but nonetheless may use the ear as a compositional pivot. Sculptures which do not seem, at first, to be concerned with the ear on closer inspection do reveal the ears. The *Victory group* (1525-50) in this way conveys a crucial aural relationship between the vanquished Michelangelo and the young man over him.
7. The *Four Slaves* (or *Captives*) intended for the Tomb of Julius II (fifth project, 1530-33), together with the *Victory group* were in Michelangelo's studio at his death in 1564 (Vasari) and were given by Michelangelo's nephew Lionardo to Grand Duke Cosimo I. They were later positioned in the grotto in the Boboli gardens before coming to the Galleria dell' Accademia, Florence. These are *The Young Giant, Atlas, The Bearded Giant, The Awakening Giant*. Ludwig Goldscheider, *Michelangelo: Paintings, Sculpture, Architecture* (London: Phaidon, 1953/1962), figs. 216-225.
8. "Michael Angelo left a proof / On the Sistine

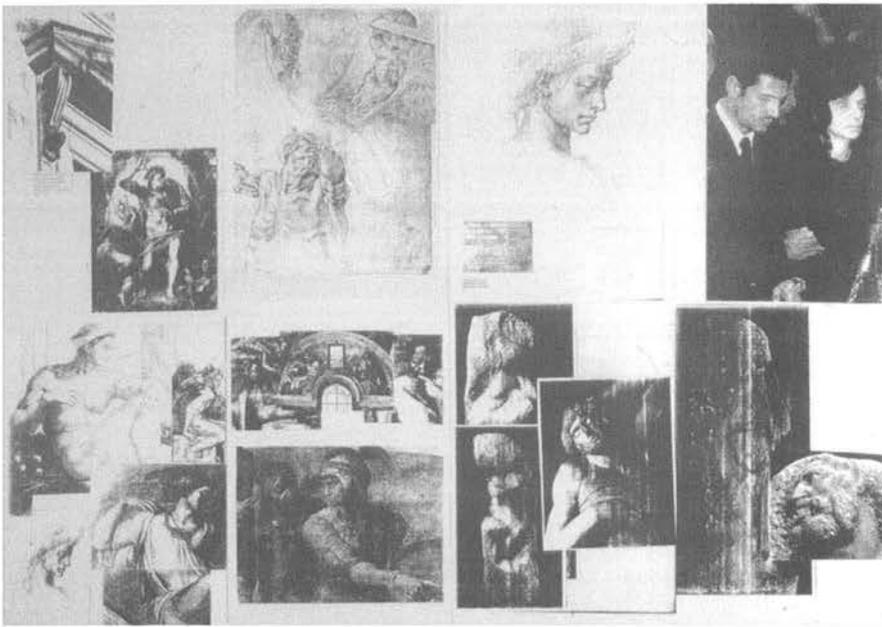
As I began to inspect Michelangelo's work aurally—that is, I began “listening” to his work—my own initial scan of ears left me with the general impression that ears are most often covered, blurred, faintly or roughly outlined, or otherwise disregarded.⁶ I thus began to notice the particular circumstances when they weren't, and to bring into focus themes underlying these occurrences.

Was I attributing significance where there was none? It is the palpable condition of “unhearing” which gradually assumed crucial significance on re-reading Liebert's study of Michelangelo's emotional life. I could quickly recognise the aural significance of the *Four Slaves*, for instance:⁷ that despairing stone headlock of unhearingness. Are these ears half-formed, or not even formed, as Yeats might conclude?⁸ Aural inspection led me quickly to the conclusion that here are ears of despair *open*, in the realm of stone, hearing nothing. Ears are blocked by heavy limbs, shoulders, and by appalling masses of stone. Each figure is in the grip of a frightening obstruction of aural access.

Aural access thus becomes the subject of enquiry, focused and fluent in the fine red chalk drawing *Young man with earring* who I now call “the listening one,” or in its denial and frustration the reason for the uncut stone.⁹

I soon realised that there was often in the same figure both these stances, with one ear turned down toward, or to contact solid—a shoulder, arm, torso—and the other ear turned upward to open space, or toward others. A diagonal tilting inclination of the head results.¹⁰ This is characteristic of Michelangelo's figures, whatever the torso might be doing. I thus became alert to how these diagonal axes interacted, implied and generated across space by the figures.

At the same time I became aware that the general condition to which this inclined stance of the head tended, that of one ear pressed as it were into solid whilst the other cupped air, meant that each of Michelangelo's figures had contact with two different aural realms simultaneously. Conceptually both ears were open whatever circumstance might close them. Thus Cellini's so-called front view is indeed Michelangelo's premise, whereby Michelangelo's painted and sculptured “reliefs,” by exploiting the profile, maintained always for him potential aural access simultaneously to two realms.¹¹ I realised that the diagonal axis through the head between the two ears was an axle around which Michelangelo composed.



Composite by author.
(All references cited in text and footnotes 1-13)

Lévi-Strauss has pointed out that the frontal view in Maori figure carving is composed of two side views.¹² But Michelangelo does not pretend faciality. Eventually, he is not concerned with it.¹³ He tends to dismantle faciality. After the *Madonna of the Stairs*, that tender teenage work, he is no longer concerned with the open illusory nuances of Donatello's reliefs.¹⁴ Rather he attacks the rock, demanding aural access. Impatient as Moses he strikes the rock, super-sensitive to its flaws, alert to its ringing, that pure frequency of his line of communication to the realm of death and eternity.

Whatever the deeper underlying quest—for contact with a dead mother, or with a Divine creator—a history of Michelangelo's aural access to his young male loves might be traced in his art. And that there are both periods of fluency and times of despairing closure.

Lack of interest in the ear may reflect the view that the ear, shaped rather like the mould-boards of a plough (*auris*), may not rate highly on a scale of preferred facial beauty.¹⁵ Indeed, the ear could be considered to interrupt, distract from, and even destroy faciality. How can ears compete with oval, long lashed, heavy lidded eyes, or with a long straight nose, or curved fulsome lips, or with fine bone structure, a high forehead, a cleft chin?

In his biography of Michelangelo Condivi assures us that Michelangelo's own ears are flat and the "right size."¹⁶ He is not concerned with their aural function. Daniel da Volterra's sculpted portrait confirms this.¹⁷ Maybe he corrected them a little?

Michelangelo makes use of exaggeration in grotesque masks and heads with animal references and mild obscenities—one ear erect, the other limp, for example.¹⁸ Ears readily imply lewdness in the Renaissance vocabulary, as in the satyr with *Bacchus* (1497). This could be the problem with ears. Whatever their erotic potential, for which the ear-lobe may suffice, ears may be considered difficult in depiction—squiggly and irregular within; their shells too large, threatening to enlarge further, and inclined to semaphore signalling. Perhaps ears are best concealed, avoided, or walled flat in conformity to the face.¹⁹

Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, the oblique auricular shells of the ears frame a penetration of the head that reinforces faciality with further "black holes."²⁰ But these are in the

Chapel roof / Where but half-awakened
Adam / Can disturb globe-trotting Madam /
Till her bowels are in heat, / Proof that
there's a purpose set / Before the secret
working mind / Profane perfection of
mankind." W. B. Yeats, "Under Ben Bulbin,"
Last Poems 1936-1939. Yeats: Poems
(London: Everyman's Library, David Camp-
bell), 1995.

9. Hartt includes this drawing, which he titles *Head in Profile* (1533-34?), as one of Michelangelo's "Divine Heads." He notes the model is a youth and seems to resist the notion that the model may have actually worn female clothing, and that the youth and Michelangelo may have found this agreeable. The youth, he observes, is "seized by some haunting and nameless melancholy. The female dress, probably added from imagination, gives the work a strange, transvestite appearance, yet the quality is high enough to transcend *even that*." (Emphasis added; Hartt, 259.) Goldscheider titles the drawing *Profile with Fantastic Head-Dress*. He considers the drawing "more mechanical" in manner than the earlier Perini presentation drawings to which he nonetheless feels this drawing belongs. He concludes the model is a young man, most probably Perini, and cites the Danish poet Jens Peter Jacobsen's confirmation of the "erotic atmosphere pervading this drawing." Ludwig Goldscheider, *Michelangelo's Drawings* (London: Phaidon, 1951), 42 n. 64. Charles de Tolnay (*The Final Period*, vol. 5 of *Michelangelo* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960/71], 170 n. 152) considers the model to be a young woman, and detects an "oriental air" on account of the "turban-like headdress" suggesting, he feels, a Biblical ancestor of Christ. A similarity of profile and headdress is marked for the woman in the Sistine lunette *Azor and Sadoch*. This combined with the solitary figure of *Azor*, who has been noted to resemble Michelangelo, strengthens the association. Tolnay does not make



this connection (Charles de Tolnay, *The Sistine Ceiling*, vol. 2 of *Michelangelo* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945/69], 87). The profile of Eleazor in the first lunette painted by Michelangelo after finishing the ceiling also bears a similarity to the Ashmolean drawing; as does the *ignudo* above Jeremiah, in the last bay of the ceiling to be painted; and those above Joel in the first bay. (Anny Popp in Goldscheider, *Michelangelo's Drawings*.) The *Azor and Sadoch* group is surely quoted in the *Crucifixion of St Peter*, in which the two figures face one another. The horseman in profile, similar to the woman Sadoch, is now the one who turns over his shoulder, as does Azor, to face Michelangelo.

10. *The Dying Captive* (1514-16) is an example.
11. Taking up Benedetto Varchi's challenge concerning the relative value of painting and sculpture, Benvenuto Cellini advances his own notion of sculpture's multiplicity of views—eight at least, front, behind, left and right, plus four diagonals. Cellini considered Michelangelo to be primarily a one view, frontal sculptor in relief. "Cellini was a vital link between Michelangelo and the development of sculpture in Florence. In 1547 he took part in the exchanges launched by Varchi on the rival merits of painting and sculpture, and contributed the thought that sculpture was seven times greater than painting since a statue must have eight views all of equal quality (that is, four main views of the main axes and four diagonal axes).
"This new concept of 'multi-faciality' did not apparently fit well with Michelangelo's relief-like method of attacking the stone with hammer and claw chisel to create one principle view." George Bull, *Michelangelo: A Biography* (London: Viking, 1995), 381.
12. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Split Representation in the Art of Asia and America," *Structural Anthropology* 1, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (London: Penguin), 245-268.
13. Many of Michelangelo's poems are concerned with beauty of the face and its effect on him, particularly that of the eyes. It could be that Michelangelo is concerned

wrong plane for faciality. For the profile the ear hole is a second eye. Faciality thus distracts from an aural approach.²¹

Michelangelo is undoubtedly prompted to observe closely the ear when confronted with someone whom he considers exceptionally beautiful. Clear definition of the ear's inner shell seems to result, with the ear's forked ribbed structure serving to hold the outer shell clear of the head, as in the Ashmolean red chalk drawing *Young man in profile with earring and head gear*. A concave smudge of hatched lines, or semi-circle, otherwise often sufficed to indicate the form of this inner plate.²² In the fine red chalk drawing this upper semi-circle is developed as a rib system forking from a longer rib below. The clearly presented Sistine ceiling ears in profile are of this type, and also the ears of the earlier *David*.²³

Can this red chalk drawing be a refinement of these earlier works, and therefore linked to the arrival of Gherardo Perini in Michelangelo's life as Goldscheider suggests, dating it around 1528-30, at the end of their association? Or is it coincident with the earlier Sistine ceiling, referring to someone of this period?²⁴ Hartt places the drawing with the later presentation drawings of around 1533-34 and therefore believes the "divine beauty" to be that of Tommaso de'Cavalieri.²⁵

A serpentine motif, probing and beak-like, is used repeatedly in various ways in the presentation drawings for Tommaso.²⁶ Can there be a connection with the ear for these drawings? A sighting of the *Laocoon*, discovered in January 1506, with its serpentine forked motifs and Michelangelo's painting *Leda and the Swan* (1529-30) likewise can be related to the forked rib structure of the ear.²⁷ All these works have erotic implications. But such speculation does not probe the ear's aural function and its significance for Michelangelo, other than to suggest a link of Michelangelo's expression of love with eroticism.

Following Wilde, the red chalk study for the head of Leda at the Casa Buonarroti, Florence, with its ear comparable to that of the Ashmolean red chalk drawing, must be dated 1529-30 and therefore can be also associated with Gherardo Perini, not with Tommaso de'Cavalieri.²⁸ Stressing similarity for these two drawings, by means of the ear, confirms the 1528-30 date for the Ashmolean drawing. The two drawings are surely the same model. However, if refinement of the rib structure is argued in the Ashmolean drawing a later Cavalieri date is possible, and the Casa Buonarroti drawing seems more closely allied to the Sistine ceiling period.²⁹



Head and other Features including an Ear, Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

The Renaissance and the Counter Reformation have distinctive aural characteristics. Giorgio Vasari punctuates his life of Michelangelo with a stirring aural cue, although his theme is the visual glory of the subject and the age.³⁰

Oh what a truly happy age is ours! O blessed artists. You must truly be called (*chiamare*) so since in your time you have been able, at the fount of such shining brightness, to let the scales drop from your eyes and see made plain all that was difficult, by such a marvellous and singular artist!

Vasari concludes the life with another aural cue.

So long as the world endures, their fame will live most gloriously for ever through the mouths of men and the pen of writers, notwithstanding envy and in despite of death.

But Vasari's aural cues are facially conceived, relating to the eyes and the mouth, much as do Shakespeare's sonnets to his young male friend, written not long after Vasari.³¹

This sort of facial orientation can be detected in Michelangelo's early sculpture, relating perhaps to issues of self-identity.³² Hartt perceives a boyish stance, compact, accentuating breadth, yet willowy and supple with natural grace.³³ There is also a frown.³⁴ The *Angel with Candlestick* (1494-5) in San Domenico, Bologna; *Saint Proculus* (1494-5) and *Saint Paul* (1501-4), for the Piccolomini Altar in Siena Cathedral; *Bacchus* (1496-7); *David* (1501-4); and the child with the *Bruges Madonna* (1504) all share these characteristics. Yet *David* presents his broad boyish head strikingly in profile to a frontal view of his torso.

If the cloak of the earlier *Saint Proculus* blowing out to his left side can be understood as an enveloping aural shell, is this work therefore an equivalent to Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1485-90), with *David* unclothed the logical sequel? The aural implications of the sea and scallop shell in Renaissance architecture, including St. Peter's, in which the shell is placed over niches and windows, is profound. Is *David* holding a pearl in his hand? Is his left hand raised to his shoulder holding the vestige of a cloak in place, now a sling?

In Botticelli's painting, Venus' hair and the red cloak held out to her left side by a nymph, with the outline of an ear shape at its nearest margin, complement the scallop shell. The enveloping shell-like cloak is ubiquitous in Michelangelo's work of this period, continuing to the Sistine

in his visual art with aural attitudes: i.e. he uses visual art as a way of depicting aural relations; whereas in his writing, and conversation, when aural relations are assured, Michelangelo is concerned with the visual, his own special forte.

14. Donatello's *Pazzi Madonna* is cited by both de Tolnay and Liebert in relation to Michelangelo's first relief, the *Madonna of the Stairs*.
15. In turning the furrow, the plough opens the earth lifting up a convex mound over a cleft. The earth now *listens*, receptive to the seed of the word, no longer a barren, smooth, stony surface. Goldscheider observes "When he (Michelangelo) cannot dispense with landscape in a painting, it is a primitive, stony landscape, such as might have emerged from the waters on the day the earth was created—bare and devoid of vegetation, wild and empty." (Goldscheider, *Michelangelo's Drawings*, 16.) He continues, "Everything Michelangelo had to express, he expressed through human beings—through the symbol of human form and the signs of bodily movements. Michelangelo fashioned a language for the expression of that which cannot be spoken." Michelangelo was undoubtedly alert to the ploughed furrow of the human ear, receptive to the seed of the word. The charioteer (*aurigo*) who also ruts the earth may well be the subliminal subject of Michelangelo's sculptural group *Victory* (1525-30), in which the contorted figure, considered a self image, is hunched under, and between the legs of the upright Perini period youth, whose beautiful curving torso connects Michelangelo's ear to his own. Liebert, 274.
16. Ascanio Condivi, *Life* (1553) in Bull, 353.
17. The bronze bust portrait was made by Daniele, a companion and protege of Michelangelo, who made four paintings from designs Michelangelo prepared for him; it was made after Michelangelo's death, and based on a death mask and Daniele's own portrait drawing made about 1550 for a fresco. Linda Murray, *Michelangelo: His Life, Work, and Times* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 176, 227.
18. A demonic horned figure in the central section of *The Last Judgement*, immed-



ately above the altar, has an outsize ear, of normal profile, but without the forked rib within. Several demons around Charon's boat have long pointed animal-like ears culminating in those of the serpent entwined Minos and the oar-wielding Charon. Others have gross, distorted ears of various forms. The forked serpent is noticeably at Minos' groin, not within his ear. The drawing *Grotesque masks* (1527-29, 1546?), "whimsical to the point of caricature. Grinning, leering satyrs" (Hartt, 347), has two heads with signalling ears, one up and one down each, and a third head with long drooping ear shells. Ornamental masks on the front and back of the cuirass of *Giuliano de' Medici*, in the Medici Chapel, each have fanciful ears (Goldscheider, *Michelangelo*, figs. 194-195). Giuliano's striking, frontally preferred profile (as for the earlier *David*, a surely intended quotation) accentuates the exceptionally aural stance of the entire figure (Goldscheider, *Michelangelo*, fig. 174). The cuirass mask in front, between the pectoral musculature, establishes emphatic aural connection reminiscent of the Child of the *Madonna of the Stairs*. The rear mask likewise accesses the smooth closure of Giuliano's broad muscled back, and is joined by the stunning inclination of his head rearward, presenting the left ear. The entire figure is aurally sensitised in this way, alert to the sculptor even when Michelangelo works behind the stone. In comparison to the figure of *Lorenzo de' Medici* is, both frontally and behind, except for the hands, aurally inert. One gains the impression that Michelangelo auscultates the entire surface of the figure as he sculpts, thus accessing the interior of both the stone block and Giuliano formed from it. Lorenzo is pre-occupied except for his right hand cupped aurally outward. Giuliano's hands both cup a baton, a long rolled tube, a stance which invites comparison with the Laurentian Library vestibule's recessed columns. If this figure of Giuliano has indeed been inspired by Michelangelo's friendship with Tommaso de' Cavalieri, there is here a convincing ex-

ceiling; and *St Paul* and *St Proculus*. Bacchus has a skin on his left, into which ear-like aperture his fingers probe; the child in the *Bruges Madonna* is tucked into the Virgin's cloak on her left side; on the Sistine ceiling, Isaiah and the Delphic Sibyl, among many others, are accommodated within the shell of their cloaks, that of the Delphic Sibyl billowing out to her left.

Charles de Tolnay considers the back-turning young heroic Hercules-Christ child in the *Madonna of the Stairs* relief a double innovation in Italian art, both for stance and physique.³⁵ He observes the oneness of mother and child, "born from the very flesh of the mother ... completely enclosed in the silhouette of his mother as a seed in a fruit ... emerging from the cloth as though from the womb of his mother."³⁶ In thus noting the shell-like outlines of the folds of the Madonna's dress around the child, de Tolnay comes close to perceiving what I take to be the outlines of an aural shell.

Is this not the explanation of the child's back? The child is not emerging (from his mother), as Michelangelo's later resurrection drawings will so marvellously depict, but *entering* his mother. Does not the child, like Aladdin's genie returning to the lamp, follow a spiral *descent*, just as the Word entered the Virgin's ear at the Annunciation? Is there not the oval outline of an aural shell in the Virgin's clothing and posture around the child on her left side and echoed on her left shoulder? The Virgin's left ear is strongly outlined beneath her garment, evoking the later Sistine Sibyls.

The child's *contrapposto* hand is cupped at his back as an aural shell open to the void. His fluttering, active fingers anticipate those of the sleeping Adam on the Sistine ceiling during the Creation of Eve. Michelangelo's early works are thus rich in subtle, perhaps hidden aural cues. There are detailed auricular folds adjacent to the *Bruges Madonna* child's left ear. The satyr in *Bacchus* brings his mouth and long pointed ears to the grapes flowing out of the auricular folds of the animal skin at Bacchus' side, and which Bacchus fondles. Bacchus' own ears likewise overflow with grapes. *St. Peter's Pieta* (1498-9) is stunningly visual and sepulchral, yet are not the left hands of mother and son cupped together in aural discourse, as sound lingers between Christ's lips? And do not the children depicted at the top of the stair in Michelangelo's first relief bring hand to ear, and hand to hand as ear to ear?

One supposes that the youthful Michelangelo gradually opened his soul to the world, ears and all, and that this buoyancy carried him into the Sistine Chapel, for the first half of the ceiling, having established a rapport with peers, patrons, and maybe a love or two. A strong aural relationship with patrons is part of the Michelangelo legend.

There is plenty of open ear bounce in the Sistine ceiling. But then does he get hurt? Is he let down? Or does he become simply tired? Is he spent—at 37 years of age?³⁷ Does he just drop the self-identity issue of youth? Does he now look out of himself for someone else; a succession of loves—Perini, Mini, Cavalieri, Vittoria Colonna—the outward expression of his inner search for love?³⁸

Beauty, associated exclusively with youth, accompanies a shift to a feminine type head—a longer nose, slit eyes, wider mouth—the elongated facial type Michelangelo uses for Madonnas, derived from studies of handsome young men of aristocratic grace often dressed in women's clothing, of which the red chalk Ashmolean drawing is an example.³⁹ This is not an ephebe attached to a muscular torso, as are the Sistine *ignudi* dancing in the Divine audit.⁴⁰ The heads in *Young man in profile with earring and head gear*, *Giuliano de' Medici*, the *Medici Madonna* (1524-34) and *Victory* (1525-30) are all of this kind. George Bull attributes the elegance and refinement of the *Giuliano de' Medici* sculpture in the Medici Chapel (1520-34) to the impact of Tommaso de' Cavalieri on Michelangelo. He sees the earlier *Lorenzo de Medici* as abstract and characterless by comparison.⁴¹

A shift from confident pen hatching to soft fine chalk makes possible the small fine presentation drawings that continue for Vittoria Colonna to enjoy under a magnifying glass. Throughout these drawings a search for a living loved youth, linked by Liebert to a young lost mother, carries with it distinct aural implications expressed by a focus on the ear in profile.

With Tommaso de' Cavalieri in his life, even covered ears can indicate aural consummation with the listening one longed for in the *Madonna of the Stairs* relief, without a hint of blockage and its accompanying despair at abandonment and betrayal, portrayed in the *Four Slaves*. Goldscheider attributes the black chalk Windsor drawing *Youth's head with ear flaps* to this period (1533).⁴² The black chalk British Museum portrait *Andrea Quaratesi* (c. 1530) has half flaps over the ears.⁴³ Is this a crucial step towards trust and satisfaction not evidently experienced with his passion for Febo di Poggio during 1534-5?⁴⁴

At a time when the world was looking at Michelangelo's work, whether to emulate or criticise, it would seem Michelangelo came to know the immense satisfaction of personal aural relationships; of knowing that there was someone in the world close by listening to him and speaking with him. A succession of young men led to a cluster of affectionate friends, and, with advancing age, to professional association with young artists and writers eager to listen, to whom Michelangelo responded with trust and affection.⁴⁵

Michelangelo's age demanded that he address vast themes of aural discourse. Commissioned to spatialise the spoken word, Michelangelo provides a visual path as an aid to memory, so that the word can become an inner voice. The Sistine Chapel's ceiling's narrative of history is aurally

pression of their intimate aural relationship.

19. I have abbreviated Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "white wall." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 170. See note 88.

20. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 170.

21. Despite the upheaval of traditional aural attitudes induced by printing ("Michelangelo, who by his own admission had never 'examined closely' the art of printing, *stamperia*, until Priscianese explained it to him in 1546 ..." Robert J. Clements, *The Poetry of Michelangelo* [London: Peter Owen, 1966], 148-149), the Renaissance is in many ways preoccupied with faciality architecturally. The architectural drawing, and the smooth ashlar stone façade, takes on the iconographic significance of the face. Elsewhere I have linked the beauty of the smooth building façade with that of the face of youth by means of Shakespeare's sonnets. Black ink lines on white paper become for Shakespeare an obsession. In receiving the impress of the word smooth white paper, embossed like the ploughed earth, becomes aurally sensitised, and the beauty of youth eternal (John Dickson, "'O carve not ... nor draw no lines' On the Stones of Shakespeare (1564-1616): The Subversion of Fertility," *Interstices* 2 [1992]: 135-157). Just as reading is an act of individual listening, a reading of Michelangelo's visual work engages active aural participation. With its emphasis on the eyes and mouth frontal faciality, by forcing visual engagement in relation to oral attitudes, induces aural passivity to aural extinction. Michelangelo was able to aurally sensitise paper and marble to an extraordinary degree. Goldscheider, whilst intruding in his discourse on Michelangelo's drawings some of this, assuming the irrelevance of oral attitude and aural passivity to Michelangelo's work, remarks, "Michelangelo fashioned a language for the expression of that which cannot be spoken" (Goldscheider, *Michelangelo's Drawings*, 16). But he does not recognise the specific visual evidence of Michelangelo's aural attitudes in his works.

22. An example is *Study for the head of Zechariah* (1508-9).

23. Of *Sketches of heads and features* (1504?), Hart remarks that the eye and brow are very close to that of the marble *David* (1501-4), but lingering over the mouth he does not comment on the study of an ear, the first of the three detailed studies of the ear by itself he shows. (The others are *Crucified Haman* and the study for Leah, *Young woman with mirror*.) Perhaps the ear in this pen drawing is rather more pointed than the square topped ear of the *David*, and with a finer rib structure.



24. Goldscheider, *Michelangelo's Drawings*, 42 n. 64.
25. Hartt, 259.
26. The lost *Ganymede* and the *Punishment of Tityus* (1532) both employ the motif of a bird with a probing beak; an eagle in *Ganymede* and a vulture in *Tityus*. See Paul Joannides, *Michelangelo and His Influence: Drawings from Windsor Castle* (London: National Gallery of Art, Washington, Lund Humphries, 1996), 66 fig. 12a: *Tityus*; *Ganymede* after Michelangelo by Giulio Clovio (1540). Observing how Michelangelo sensitised the body surface in these drawings, Hartt is at the brink of perceiving their aural significance: "The body of Tityus is one of the most exquisitely modeled and stippled of all Michelangelo's figure studies ... and its repertory of large and small pulsations of muscle, tendon, nerve and skin." Hartt, 250 n. 353.
27. Michelangelo viewed the statue depicting the Trojan priest Laocoon and his two sons crushed to death by serpents with Giuliano da Sangallo (Bull, 67-68). Liebert discusses the erotic implications of *Leda and the Swan* in relation to oral sex and links it with the Temptation of Adam and Eve on the Sistine ceiling. In neither case does he involve the ear, nor the relation of the ear to the breast and bird. Nor when citing the figure of Night in the Medici Chapel does he relate Night's "phallic braid" to the ear and breast, against both of which it rests (Liebert, 248-261). The drawing of Cleopatra relates all these themes of serpent, breast, braided hair, and ear with a forked rib structure.
28. *Study for the Head of Leda*: Goldscheider, *Michelangelo's Drawings*, fig.66, note page 42.
29. Goldscheider notes Berenson was reminded of the Libyan Sibyl by the *Leda* study. Goldscheider, *Michelangelo's Drawings*, fig.66, note page 42.
30. Bull, 347-349.
31. Dickson, "On the Stones of Shakespeare." Shakespeare, born the year of Michel-

discerned by the Prophets, and intuited with the inner ear by augurs, the Sibyls. The altar wall depicts the Last Audit—the Last Judgement—when the incarnated, resurrected Christ, born of the Virgin's ear by means of the received Word, calls out the dead with the sound of trumpets and angelic shouts; some rise amidst joyous exclamation, while others sink to hell with dire moanings, gnashing of teeth and beating of oars. The clamour accompanying the entry of Papal Medici into Florence—three days of bells, firing, shouts and ringing of gold—described in a letter to Michelangelo by his brother Buonarroti, indicates the style of the age with which *The Last Judgement* is in accord.

Bull describes the aural impact of this work.

All kinds of sounds float down like leaves, a fall of the noise of lamentation and self-reproach, and the intake of breath, as around the dominant image of Christ some of the resurrected embrace before their journey and the self-absorbed martyrs turn inwards to see and hear the judgement of Jesus.⁴⁶

The entire wall centres on the Great Listener (Auditor) and ear-piercer supreme. Christ's hands, like those of his Father on the ceiling, are aurally active.

Both the Sistine ceiling and the altar wall are pervaded with the theme of aural access between God and humankind throughout. Alert to this discourse the Prophets, each with ear huge and open—even when dejected, like Jeremiah—are busy with books and scrolls. The Sibyls, ears generally covered (not being favoured with direct aural access), have caught on nevertheless. The Erithraean Sibyl's ear breaks out in singular triumph as if the male model for the drawings himself enjoys the Divine aural ambience; or is it Michelangelo to whom he listens?

Ignudi, with superbly painted depilated skin texture when seen close, appealing to modern athletic eyes, dancing in the palpable pulsations of the Divine aural ambience, act as the eardrum—a smooth resonating membrane of transmission—so-called angels, guides. These bask in the open aural field of God's being, ears functioning perfectly, pulsating with Divine aural inflexions from both the solid rock of the Sibyls' world and from the open void of the Prophets' realm. At the end of the sequence however, the massive uplifted arm of a Herculean *ignudo*

blocks his ear. This *ignudo*, even more so than the accompanying terminal *ignudi*, slips into the aural shell of his enveloping garland.

De Tolnay considers that the Prophets and Sibyls “perceive with the eyes of the spirit” the Divinity who appears above their heads.⁴⁷ He is thus blind to the aural ambience of the entire ceiling.

Historical narratives that succeed one another over this vast *aula* (hall) are constructed around particular aural cues. At the Creation of Adam God, at the Divine switchboard with his accomplices (there used to be serried ranks of these young women at telephone exchanges), ear alert, presses Adam digitally, confirming Adam’s access code. Perhaps this has to be done twice. In response, Adam’s receiving ear swings around and lifts toward God, baring its black hole. Together they make an aural axle. His other ear is locked into the pale stone quarry-face of the ceiling. Meanwhile, ears cocked, the sturdy Prophets look up from their work, whilst all Christ’s Ancestors, forced to attend this vast auditorial, make one huge genealogical audience.⁴⁸ Audile *ignudi* play in the surf, riding colossal waves generated at the interface of God’s being and humankind.

Eve makes fluid aural connection with her Creator as she passes from Adam’s recumbent torso as smoothly as a transfer of funds by telephone. God’s outstretched hand cups an aural shell. The unconscious Adam’s receiver is off the hook, ears pressed to the ground. These are still obviously functioning. This can be deduced from the way Adam’s hands are cupped as two fluttering aural shells catching all that is going on, just as Michelangelo in a sonnet does not relinquish hearing in sleep.⁴⁹

Dear to me is sleep; still more to sleep
in stone while harm and shame persist;
not to see, not to feel, is bliss;
speak softly, do not wake me, do not weep.

Adam’s open cupped hands can be read in relation to the adjacent ears of an *ignudo*.

Traditional scholarship does not raise the issue of aural access where Eve’s head and open ear, at the Temptation, are level with Adam’s groin.⁵⁰ Aural cues at the Expulsion are dramatic, arranged as another aural axle.⁵¹ Eve leaves the garden covering her ears with her hands. She’s heard enough, having suffered—or fearful of suffering—the Angel’s sword directed towards Adam’s open, vulnerable ear. Does this imply piercing of the ear-drum, with consequent withdrawal of aural access and the constitution of an aural void, the curse of unhearingness, deafness to God? No longer does the ear harbour the smooth pulsating membrane of nakedness, dancing in aural discourse with the Divine. A gutted ear’s black hole must be covered, just as the naked body is covered. What ghastly ear-drum-piercing shriek does this sword represent? Is such a sound evoked again by *The Last Judgement*?

At the beginning of creation God’s forking undulating arms surge within his gyrating garments as if forming a primordial ear.⁵² As the last scene in the sequence of creation to be painted, can Michelangelo be reducing creation to its inception in a way analogous to that of the Annunc-

angelo’s death (1564), wrote the Sonnets ten years or more before they were published in 1609. *The Sonnets and A Lover’s Complaint*, ed. G. B. Harrison (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 12. Shakespeare wishes the beauty of the youth for whom he wrote the Sonnets “shall live ... where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.” Sonnet 81, 65. See note 21.

32. Daniele da Volterra’s portrait drawing of Michelangelo (c1548-55), made for a fresco and used for the bronze portrait bust, shows the relative breadth of head and features which characterise portraits of Michelangelo, including the pen drawing attributed to Bugiardini; the oil painting by Jacopino del Conte, made after 1538; and the self-portrait as Nicodemus in the *Pieta* (c1548-55); as well as the skin of Michelangelo held by Saint Bartholomew in *The Last Judgement* (1536-41). Hartt considers pen drawings of heads (1501-2) to be recognisable as self-portraits of Michelangelo in his late twenties (Hartt, figs. 10, 16, 17). These all show a characteristic breadth of features. Michelangelo’s early sculptural works, whilst sharing this characteristic of breadth, tend to have a small mouth. Perhaps this is a “correction” by Michelangelo. Steinberg compares the head of St. Paul, a possible self-portrait in Michelangelo’s last paintings, with Daniele da Volterra’s bronze bust. He cites two figures in the facing *Crucifixion of St. Peter* as likely self-portraits: an old man in a Phrygian cap and a younger horseman. Both show Michelangelo’s breadth of features. Leo Steinberg, *Michelangelo’s Last Paintings* (London: Phaidon, 1975), 53-54.
33. Hartt notes Michelangelo’s “drawings of adolescents, whose native animal grace was not yet distorted by heavy labor.” Hartt, 21.
34. Notably *Saint Proculus* (1494-5), and to a lesser extent *David* (1501-4).
35. “The Child is a significant invention by Michelangelo in the sense that he is a small ‘hero’ type rather than the usual infant. His muscular form is relaxed but even its passivity shows great potential power. The back of the Christ Child is turned toward the spectator—something without precedent in the iconography of Italian art.” Charles de Tolnay, *The Youth of Michelangelo*, vol. 1 of *Michelangelo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943/69), 76.
36. Charles de Tolnay, *The Youth of Michelangelo*, 75.
37. See Liebert, ch. 11 for a discussion of the impact on Michelangelo of the temporary suspension of the work on the Sistine ceiling, August 1510, and his revitalised approach thereafter, January 1511.
38. Goldscheider considers “The time between the forty-sixth and sixtieth years of his life was Michelangelo’s erotic period” (*Michelangelo’s Drawings*, 171), followed or



accompanied by "a long and severe spiritual crisis" which led to his friendship with Vittoria Colonna (20).

39. Goldscheider notes that a "turning point in Michelangelo's graphic style occurred while he was working on his sculptures for the Medici Chapel. The change began with the presentation drawings for Perini, and the manner was so completely different that until recent times the authenticity of these drawings was not generally acknowledged." Goldscheider, *Michelangelo's Drawings*, 16-17. He links the *Victory* sculpture with those of the Medici Chapel. As the period of the Medici sculptures is prolonged, there is doubt as to whether direct reference to Perini or the later aristocrat Cavalieri can be inferred. Goldscheider is able to link *Study of a head with ear flaps* (46) to both. He associates the feminine type of face in this drawing, in particular the slit-shaped eyes, with a return to the Madonna type Michelangelo used in his early period viz. the *Bruges Madonna*. Clearly there is a case for linking the *Victory* sculpture, *Young man in profile with earring and head gear*, and the *Giuliano de' Medici* sculpture to *Study of a head with ear flaps*.

40. Abigail Solomon-Godeau draws attention to these two types of masculinity: "It is a no less important part of my general argument that the two polar types of masculinity repeat, at least in structural terms, a binarism—an internal gendering, as it were—that is recognizable in the elite and revolutionary culture of Neoclassical France as well as in the art of classical antiquity.... In this respect, the aggressive phallicism of Joe Camel may be seen as a pop cultural descendant of the Farnese Hercules; the languid Versace boy an incarnation of the Capitoline Faun." Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 23.

41. Bull, 263.

42. Goldscheider, *Michelangelo's Drawings*, 46, note, fig 84.

43. Liebert, 298. Wilde and de Tolnay consider the drawing in the British Museum to be the

iation? The first act of the created world is thus to listen to the Word; its first discernible form is that of the ear receiving the Word, as God separates light and darkness.

Thereafter, God dramatically asserts the Divine aural axle.⁵³ Sun, moon, planets each establish their own aural axles in relation to each other. God's hands cup elements of aural response—land, water, vegetation. He is located in a tight auricular shell. This shell is echoed by several *ignudi* from the Creation of Eve to the end of Michelangelo's work; that is, from the beginning of this aural sequence until the Expulsion from the garden.

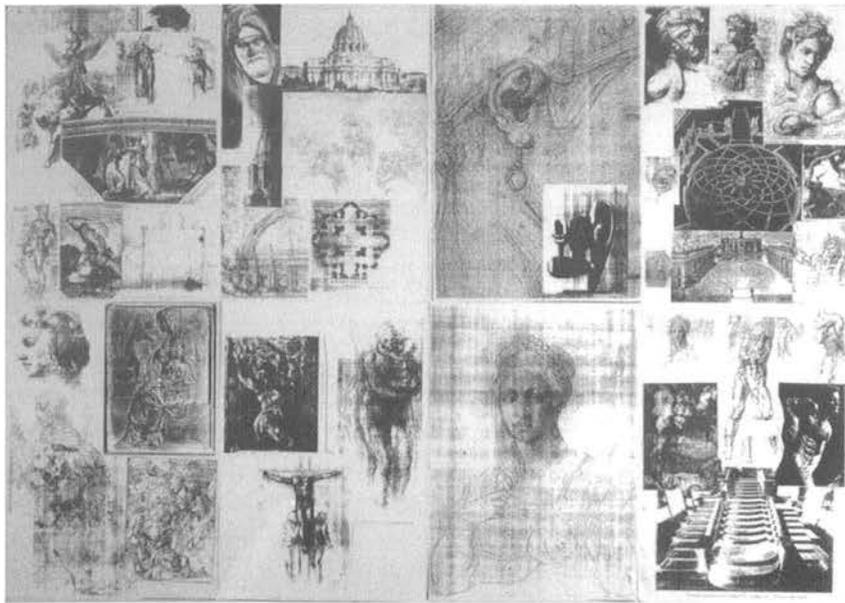
De Tolnay, aware of the shell-like form of God's mantle, confines his interpretation to the visual realm.⁵⁴ "His mantle is a kind of synthesis of the egg and the shell—oval in outline and shell-like in its protective 'roof' character."

He understands that at the very beginning God "evolves from the folds of his mantle which describes whirlwinds around his figure."⁵⁵ God's outstretched arms connect this posture to Michelangelo's drawings for the resurrected Christ, presumably for the altarpiece below. The forking of God's arms echoes the forking of his legs.⁵⁶ "His lilac mantle has the contour of a shell; but through this enfolding formed by an infinitely delicate material penetrate the powerful form of his legs."

The conclusion of the historical sequence is accompanied in the corner spandrels by violent scenes of aural destruction.⁵⁷ David savages Goliath's head as he proceeds to remove Goliath's aural axle.⁵⁸ This Judith carries away on a platter, leaving the headless torso of Holofernes writhing, unhearing, the head's void locked in blackness, just as the Four Slaves will be. In contrast to this concluding horror are the *ignudi* paired above each Prophet and Sibyl, each *ignudo* a fleshy ear-shell aurally and erotically charged by the Divine Word.

Employed throughout the Sistine narratives, the use of hands to emulate ear-shells is particularised by Michelangelo's drawings of the Annunciation.⁵⁹ In these drawings aural penetration of the body—like the act of sculpting, as Adrian Stokes believes—is a sexual equivalent or metaphor.⁶⁰

Michelangelo's presentation drawing of the Dreamer, considered by Liebert to complete the set given to Tommaso de' Cavalieri, shows a slumbering youth in the position of the Sistine Adam "inseminated by the agent of some greater paternal power" by means of a long-tubed "trumpet" applied to an ear.⁶¹ Liebert speculates that Michelangelo must surely have known of



Composite by author.
 (All references cited in text and footnotes 58-80.
 Also Tom Bianchi, *In Defense of Beauty*)

the Annunciation tradition and has made careful use of “the angel sounding his horn in the ear of the reclining nude youth.”⁶² Aural conception is concerned with privileged inside information. Close relationships may carry this desire and responsibility. Secrets, in due course, birth of their own accord. Aural access is linked, as the contemporary media demonstrates, with the issue of how one gets inside.⁶³

The *Pieta* Michelangelo worked for his own tomb significantly includes an old man, Nicodemus, considered a self-portrait by Michelangelo at the age of about 80 years. Nicodemus is the one who posed this very question to Jesus. How can one enter the womb for a second time and be born again?⁶⁴

Throughout Michelangelo’s life the colossal scale and scope of his designs, executed or otherwise, is startling. His dismantling of faciality in these compositions by means of extensive aural networks is likewise startling, challenging the ear.

Michelangelo’s design for St. Peter’s achieves colossal expression of the theme of aural access. By means of fine ashlar smoothness and a lack of rustication, noted by Ackerman, St. Peter’s culminates in the uplifted shell of the dome, ribbed like the fingers of Christ’s upraised hand cupping the ear in *The Last Judgement*.⁶⁵

In sketches for *The Last Judgement* Christ is cupped each side with shells, each formed by a myriad of figures. In exactly this manner the focal point of St. Peter’s is girt with gigantic aural shells of stone, above, and on all flanks, for Michelangelo closes Bramante’s open cross axis with an aural axle cupped by two transept shells, adding two further diagonal axles and shells.⁶⁶

To the people of the four winds,
 Hearken, Hearken, and Listen.⁶⁷

St. Peter’s domical shell, set upon gyrating shells below, are together thunderclaps of exultation.⁶⁸

For the Capitol Michelangelo chose the duo-decimal stellar design, disposed ingeniously as an oval at the top of a stair, with axial façades arranged around it, knowing at the centre of this

original—several copies also exist. Also Nicholas Turner, *Florentine Drawings of the Sixteenth Century* (London: British Museum, 1986), 121 n. 85, and colour plate, 122.

44. Liebert, 299-302.
45. Liebert, ch. 13 viz. Sebastiano del Piombo, Jacopo Pontormo and Daniele da Volterra. Also Bull, Parts 54, 83-86 and 91 for Michelangelo’s relations with friends and associates.
46. Bull, 293. Erasmus (1517) has Pope Julius II demanding entry of St Peter into Paradise on the strength of his triumphs. “St Peter: ‘That I was looking at a tyrant worse than worldly, an enemy of Christ, the bane of the church.’ Pope Julius: ‘You would say otherwise if you had witnessed even one of my triumphs ... the horses, the parade of armed soldiers, the adornments of the commanders ... the lavishness of the displays that were carried by, the procession of bishops, the proud cardinals, the trophies, the booty, the shouts of the people and the soldiers resounding to heaven, everything ringing with applause, the music of trumpets, the blast of horns, the flashing of cannon, the coins scattered among the people, and myself carried aloft like some divine thing ... they thundered in celebration of me; they proclaimed me Jupiter who shakes everything with his thunderbolt ... So you won’t open then?’ St Peter: ‘To any sooner than to such a pestilence ... you yourself are a great builder: build yourself a new Paradise.’” Desiderius Erasmus, *Julius exclusus* (Bayer Staatsbibliothek, Munich 1523 [1517]) in Loren Partridge, *The Renaissance in Rome 1400-1600* (London: Everyman Art Library, George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996), 11.
47. Charles de Tolnay, *Michelangelo: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*, trans. Gaynor Woodhouse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 28.
48. The combined presence of the ancestors in the lunettes anticipates *The Last Judgement*.
49. Bull, 308-309.

50. Adam leans forward, with back-thrust buttocks, forming with his groin a cupped shell for Eve's head and ear in particular. Liebert (258) relates this composition to *Leda and the Swan*, with the view that the reference is to oral sex, and thus is Michelangelo's way of identifying with Eve sensually. Comparison with the early painting *The Holy Family (Doni Tondo)*, in which an erotic identification with the Virgin is not required even though the Virgin's face is turned towards the Child's groin, suggests an aural relationship is intended viz. reference to the Annunciation. This is reinforced in *Doni Tondo* by the clarity of the ears of the Virgin, Christ Child and Joseph, as well as the inclination of the heads, and hence the related aural axes; together with the intimate aural proximity, and similar axial inclination of the male nude youths in the background. Eve's thick braided hair can also be observed, connecting her breast and ear.

51. The symmetry of this composition suggests the opposition of hearing and unhearing, with the forked rib motif within the ear as the serpent entwined about the tree. The Crucifixion is the counterpart of the Fall, and is surely linked in Michelangelo's imagination to the serpent coiled about the tree, as his drawings of the curvilinear body of Christ on the cross suggest. See further *Crucifixion* (1538-40?); and the later drawings *Crucifixion with Virgin and St. John* (1550-55?) with forked cross arms; *Crucifixion with Virgin and St. John*; and *Crucified Christ* (1550-55?). It may be fanciful to relate the coiled serpent, its tail in particular, to the cochlea, the spiral coils of the inner ear. The serpent's breast suggests comparison with the drawing *Cleopatra* (1532-33), originally made for Cavalieri (c.1532-33), in which the inclination of Cleopatra's three-quarter profile head over her shoulder, although looking downward, is similar to Eve's. Cleopatra's braided hair, coiling around her neck and shoulder, combines with the snake coiling around her breast and shoulder, to link her breast with her ear as for Eve. Cleopatra's ear has a clearly defined forked structure within the shell, suggesting analogical

ancient representation of the cosmos, under a stone, is the Delphic python.⁶⁹ The act of listening is, above all, a means of entering, a way inside. Recognition of this provided Michelangelo with a form for linking his interior emotional life with the public art of architecture.

The convex mound of the stellar oval shield links the breast with the ear, just as in the *Madonna of the Stairs* relief.⁷⁰

Michelangelo's architectural compositions could thus be linked with his emotional life. A life-long struggle with desire and guilt and fear of damnation; alienation from a lost mother, and an insensitive, uncaring father and family: these are Michelangelo's themes.⁷¹ Aural access and aural gratification are a preoccupation in the Herculean task of stone-quarrying and sculpting. Aural access is represented by means of stairs—the *Madonna of the Stair* relief, the Laurentian Library, and Capitol. Associated with the motif of the stair, oval shells are used to depict aural generation (origins), regeneration, and consummation. The forked rib structure within the ear-shell becomes the serpent. At the moment of aural consummation comes an awareness of sin and guilt, and fear of damnation, expiated by the serpent on the cross as an image of redemption and healing, all still within the shell of the ear.⁷² Just as from within this shell came the generative acts of creation and the Incarnation, so too comes the joyous, triumphant Resurrection, and ultimate spiritual union with God and loved ones. The life-long serpentine stair of desire is transcended by the eagle-drawing of *Ganymede*, lifting the Redeemed into the Divine aural ambience, with the *ignudi* of the Sistine ceiling.

In the colossal silence of his own making Michelangelo performs an auscultation upon the breast of his lost mother of sepulchral stone, listening for the palpitation of her heart and breath.

The child Michelangelo climbs his mother's rocky breast as a stair. This is clear from his first known sculpture relief, the *Madonna of the Stairs*, carved when Michelangelo was 16 years of age. Later, with the help of her long curling ringlets or braided (runged and stepped) hair, and earring, depicted in his drawings of *Ideal Heads* of youths and women, he can perhaps reach the ledge of his mother's shoulder, where level with her ear he can murmur sweet nothings.⁷³

His last drawing, made in his old age not long before his death, shows exactly this.⁷⁴ It makes one want to applaud. Michelangelo is a prolific murmurer indeed, a keen conversational-



Cleopatra, Casa Buonarroti, Florence.

ist, and a compulsive writer of letters and poems.

All these themes are present in the architecture of the Laurentian Library stair leading up to the library at shoulder level. When recalling for Vasari this stair designed 30 years before, Michelangelo significantly refers to both a babble of voices and a contrasting realm of dreams, emphasising that the stair must be clear of the walls.⁷⁵

Concerning the stairway for the library that I have been asked about so much, believe me, if I could remember how I planned it I would not need to be asked. A certain staircase comes to my mind just like a dream, but I don't think it can be the same as the one I had in mind originally since it seems so awkward ... leaving the lower part of each wall of the anteroom completely unobstructed.

In accord with Liebert I have assumed a preoccupation and progression in Michelangelo's work from the first annunciation of aural themes in the *Madonna of the Stairs*, via profiles of *Heads* and their deployment in larger compositions, to the last drawings of the *Madonna and Child* at ear level. If in the *Madonna of the Stairs* the sepulchral, contemplative listening stance of the mother and child is dominant, the stairway is boldly indicated also, as a crucial aspect of the composition, depicting perhaps the life of action and good works as a speaking.⁷⁶

With the young Michelangelo one can, in the imagination, cling to Carrara's vast quarry face, or to the Sistine Chapel's reconstituted stony surfaces; or traverse the more intimate aural profiles with the older Michelangelo; or climb with him the Laurentian Library stair.

On this stair each footfall sounds in the otherwise vacated *aula* "as in a dream;" each footfall is "heard" by each resonating oval box tread, whilst aural shells each side receive the long tubes of withdrawing columns into their folds.⁷⁷ Repetitive oval shells diminish toward infinity; each footfall excavates the rock with the ring of hammer and claw. Flakes of stone pile higher beneath one's feet until in the excavated aural void one reaches the shoulder, level with the Divine intellect, the repository of Divine knowledge that has, within the excavated silence, placed the living Word into the ears and mouths of humankind and indeed of all things. Each footfall is also a speaking, each oval tread also a mouth. Can these be also the cupped hands of God, creating each listening step toward the Divine? And are not the cupped listening recesses receiving the long tubes of the columns also hands, as depicted in the drawings of the "sins"

connection with the themes of Temptation, Fall, and Redemption. The sensuality of all these works seems to focus on the crucial issue of aural access; of humanity with God, God enjoyed and unavailable; of humanity with the tempter, involving the pleasures of sin, betrayal, guilt, remorse, despair of unhearingness, and forgiveness. De Tolnay considers this drawing a copy (169-170 n. 151).

52. The surge of this gesture, with similarities of accompanying shell-like, vaporous, swirling mantle is that also of the Christ Child in the drawing for the *Taddei Madonna* (1501-2), and various Resurrection studies. See further in Hartt, notably figs. 125, 254 and 256. De Tolnay sees this gesture of uplifted arms as one of self liberation, "a spirit seeking itself" (*The Sistine Ceiling*, 40). The dynamic of the surrounding composition with four *ignudo*, one at each corner of the frame, makes the whole a stunning *quincunx*, comparable in force to the sheet layout of studies for *The Crucified Haman* (1511), in which four extended arms with aurally cupped hands radiate, gyrate around the central pivot of the ear detail. That Michelangelo should choose to introduce, level with God's groin, the muscular *ignudo* with his ear blocked by his own upraised arm, heightens the aural drama of the whole composition and the entire ceiling. The diagonal thrust through the *quincunx* from God's swirling arms and the aurally enraptured *ignudo* with the upraised arm, passes along God's torso to the closed ear of the muscular *ignudo*, leading directly downward to the crucified Haman, whose twisting torso with upraised arms repeats God's form. The opposing diagonal thrust through the *quincunx* leads downward to the uplifted coiled brazen serpent midst the turbulent, writhing, serpent-entwined, *Laocoon*-inspired orgiastic figures, whose pointed faces become indistinguishable from the serpents. These two triangular pendentive paintings above the altar wall open out analogically the themes of sin, and the healing of Redemption, contained in God's ear-like—forked rib within shell—configuration, and thus implicit in the first act of



Creation.

53. The aural *quincunx* noted above is repeated in the ground plan for San Giovanni dei Fiorentini (1549). Here it is superimposed on that of the cardinal points. All axes are terminated in apses and cupolas, just as the extended arms of God locate cupped hands in space. There is a later plan in pen, wash, red and black chalk (1559). A sketch plan (1519) for the Medici Chapel, Florence, shows a similar disposition of shell-like elements.
54. De Tolnay, *The Sistine Ceiling*, 37.
55. De Tolnay, *The Sistine Ceiling*, 40.
56. De Tolnay, *The Sistine Ceiling*, 38.
57. The *quincunx* in *The Drunkenness of Noah*, in which the unhearing "Adam" is contrasted with four aurally alert *ignudi*, connects diagonally the two pendentive scenes above the entry wall—that of Judith and Holofernes and David and Goliath—in which Holofernes and Goliath are violently rendered irretrievably aurally inert.
58. *Study for the bronze David* (1501-2) shows David's right foot savaging the decapitated head of Goliath's right ear.
59. Hart notes the "intimate and close" nature of these drawings (see figs. 431, 432, and 435). In fig. 536, the Angel whispers into Mary's ear and points with his right hand. Mary's left hand is cupped in surprise. In the Uffizi, and Pierpont Morgan Library drawings, Mary's cupped hands are drawn in detail; Michael Hirst, *Michelangelo and his Drawings* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), figs. 100 and 101. Comparison with the early painting of the Holy Family (*Doni Tondo*) suggests a reference to how the Child was conceived.
60. "Man, in his male aspect, is the cultivator or carver of woman. The stone block is female." Adrian Stokes, "Stone and Clay 4: Carving, Modelling and Agostino," *Stones of Rimini Part 11*, vol. 1 of *The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes (1930-1937)* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 230-33.
61. Liebert, 310.

surrounding the Dreamer?⁷⁸

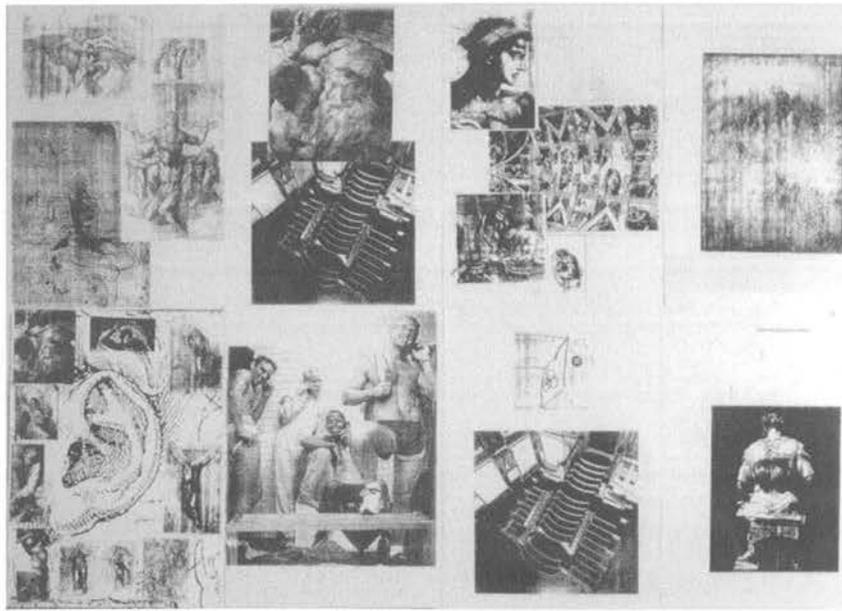
In the Laurentian Library stair vestibule we are encompassed by the pulsating sound of Michelangelo's auscultation of the Divine, arms open to receive him.⁷⁹

And this oval stairway should have two wings, one on either side, following the center steps but straight instead of oval.

Arms, wings, or ears? Michelangelo's presentation drawings of Ganymede for Tommaso de' Cavalieri links all these. As on the Library stair Ganymede is lifted up into the void completely unobstructed except for the embrace of the eagle.⁸⁰ Wings supplant arms at shoulder level. Talons supplant the forked legs of structure no longer anchored to the earth. Feet now probe the aural void much as the bird's beak probes for inner access, despite evident anal penetration pinning Ganymede to the eagle's covering mass. Is the bird's beak seeking aural access, desired above all else? If so, then Ganymede's last refuge of modesty is surely his ear turned down to his shoulder. Is it not this for which the bird's serpentine beak is searching?⁸¹

The Word that from the beginning was with, and was God, wrote John, became the flesh and we beheld his glory full of grace and truth.⁸² If Leonardo da Vinci depicted, by means of his science, truth; and Raphael, by means of his charm, depicted grace; what was left for Michelangelo? The depiction of glory? The Word itself? Its origins? It could be that Michelangelo, the practical sculptor, fresco painter, architect, engineer, writer and communicator was concerned, from his first works, with both the means of aural access and its significance.

The complexity and subtlety of Michelangelo's interpretation of these themes can be appreciated by comparison with Agostino Ciampelli's simple depiction of the oration of Benedetto Varchi at Michelangelo's funeral in San Lorenzo, Florence, painted for Michelangelo's grand nephew fifty years later.⁸³ Aural access is the theme. Varchi, focally positioned, directs his words to the upturned open ear of each listener, chiefly those in profile. Varchi's cupped extended hand constructs an audience. This gesture is echoed by a man quietening children and a dog in the foreground. There is secondary aural discourse between two men. A central figure's back is reminiscent of that of Giuliano de' Medici in the Medici Chapel.⁸⁴ In the foreground a



Composite by author.
(All references cited in text and footnotes 81-99)

youth cups his hand to his solid knee whilst a boy does likewise to the youth's rolled robe between his legs. Perhaps for Michelangelo the ear serves rather as an analogue of themes and events essential to Christianity.⁸⁵

By means of his aural preoccupations Michelangelo dismantled the front view. He who could destroy facialisation by painting "freckles dashing toward the horizon, hair carried off by the wind, eyes you traverse instead of seeing yourself in, or gazing into, in those glum face-to-face encounters between signifying subjectivities,"⁸⁶ and who had gained the reputation of never drawing anyone's actual likeness,⁸⁷ moved swiftly from body systems (generally separate studies for each body element, including heads that characteristically combined the head of an ephebe with the torso of an Hercules) to overcoding entire compositions, such as the Sistine ceiling, with the image of a rock-face, as a breastscape, or pale screen for the dramatic narratives from history, to which the handsome forms and faces of the *ignudi* guide us.⁸⁸ By means of this colossal ensemble of facialities Michelangelo surely sought more than the stone-mason's wife's milk, and the stone he said he got with it.⁸⁹ By pressing his ear to the rock-face Michelangelo might also be seeking the voice and heartbeat of his dead young mother, whom he associated forever with youth and beauty. In accessing his own origins, Michelangelo also accessed the source of his own divine gifts so ordinarily placed in the world, as his own blood relatives and ancestors suggest. Michelangelo's lifelong staircase of aural access is a long haul indeed.

Thus Michelangelo's point of departure from the face—his means of access to origins, to the void, to the infinite—his pivot, his axis of obverse and reverse, is the ear.

His figures—and there are many, over 400 in *The Last Judgement* alone—each gyrate around this auricular pivot, an axle through the head connecting the austere stone quarry-face one side with the aural void the other. On one side, the sepulchral silence of a mountainside swept bare, broken by dry harsh Austral winds; on the other side, the incessant clamour of self-destructive humankind, heard nowadays within the Sistine Chapel itself.

Figures contrapose; the same head in profile connects to a torso seen from behind or front.⁹⁰ The body system twists, rotating around this aural axle like trapeze artists on the bar of a swing; or is as though pinned to a rock face, perched there like gulls on a cliff above the sea. Each figure

62. Liebert, 310. In *The Madonna of Silence* (1540?) Mary extends her finger into the sleeping Child's ear, in contrast to the fingers closing the mouths of John the Baptist and Joseph in the background. Hartt gives the traditional interpretation linking the end of life with death. The promise of resurrection and rebirth seems to lie here with the ear. Tiberio Titi's painting of Michelangelo's nephew and heir Leonardo Buonarroti placing a bust of Michelangelo on the monument designed by Vasari in Santa Croce (1570) curiously shows Michelangelo's right ear being penetrated by Leonardo's fingers as he grasps the head. The strongly modelled thick coiled rope also curiously links Leonardo's left breast to the three-quarter profile of the young workman's head, along the line of his bare arm and shoulder. Murray, 231.

63. "Beaming at his bride, Ian declared, 'She's even more beautiful inside, I love her to bits.'" "Ian Ziering marries model Nikki Schieler," *Hello!* n. 469 (August 2 1997): 14.

64. "Jesus answered, 'In truth I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born from water and spirit. You ought not to be astonished, then, when I tell you that you must be born over again. The wind blows where it wills; you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from, or where it is going. So with everyone who is born from Spirit.' Nicodemus replied, 'How is this possible?' ... 'The Son of Man must be lifted up as the serpent was lifted up by Moses in the wilderness, so that everyone who has faith in him may in him possess eternal life.'" John 3:1-15. Jesus' discourse quickly moves to aural imagery and the image of the serpent. Perhaps the old notion that the vulture was believed to be inseminated by the wind, and this taken to be an analogue for the Virgin birth, is being referred to here, and thus underlies Michelangelo's *Tityus* and *Ganymede*. De Tolnay sees this mysterious wind accompanying rebirth blowing around the Prophets Isaiah,

Ezekiel, Daniel, and Jonah on the Sistine ceiling; de Tolnay, *The Sistine Ceiling*, 47. That the created Adam and the drunken Noah both have the posture of an ancient fluvial god (de Tolnay, *The Sistine Ceiling*, 24) reflects the part water plays in birth and rebirth. In the Creation of Adam de Tolnay observes that Michelangelo does not employ the traditional image of God breathing life into Adam's nostrils by oral means. God is nonetheless consistently associated with air and whirling winds in these frescoes. "Michelangelo's figure of God the Father floating in the air is different from the figures of Quercia and Ghiberti, who, following tradition, represented Him in this scene (the Creation of Adam) in a standing position ... Michelangelo's full figure is nearer to ancient hovering Nikes as they appear on triumphal arches, eg. the Titus arch in Rome. The shell-shaped mantle may go back to the ancient 'mantle of Heaven' on representations of Zeus or Caelus." De Tolnay, *The Sistine Ceiling*, 36. Michelangelo's affinity with air in these crucial Creation scenes suggests his interest in the aural trope (*aura*: breeze, breath); its connection with large expanses of space; its analogical connection to the Virgin birth and rebirth; and thus an acquaintance with these words of John. The *Pieta* with Nicodemus (1548-55) shows Nicodemus' head in the birth position.

65. James S. Ackerman, *The Architecture of Michelangelo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 48-49.

66. *Sketches of The Last Judgement* (1534). Ackerman attributes the realisation of the malleability of mass, by understanding space as a dynamic force pushing against solids from all directions, to Bramante, and inherited by Michelangelo; Ackerman, 28-29. This perception enabled Michelangelo to develop St. Peter's flowing, undulating shell-like forms in concrete-brick construction. Nonetheless Ackerman considers this a visual perception: "it is this accent on the eye rather than on the mind that gives precedence to void over planes" (28). He is not concerned with the aural significance implicit in Michelangelo's composition, and developed by him throughout his works. See further *Studies for the dome of St. Peter's* (1546); and Ackerman, 223 fig. 106: Plan of St. Peter's after Michelangelo.

67. Dover Samuel's oral tribute to Princess Diana, New Zealand Parliament House, 2 September 1997.

68. David Jeffery has described *The Last Judgement* as "painted thunder" in "A Renaissance for Michelangelo," *National Geographic* v. 176 no. 6 (Dec. 1989): 688-701. As the Laurentian Library stair suggests, Michelangelo was aware that the aural implications of his work could become the acoustic properties of buildings. Throughout Michelangelo's life, stone and the human

seeks aural relation to others by means of these inflecting, rotating axles extended across aural space. Each figure coming forth from its aural origins clears, as it comes, aural space, for hearing presupposes aural space; just as light, Levinas says, empties space.⁹¹ And Michelangelo, the painter, knows that the colours of the dawn (*aurora*) are required for this.⁹²

Just as movement of the palpitating hand, Levinas adds, sweeps everything aside, so Michelangelo's figures clear space aurally.⁹³ Their agitated movements sweep the world back to a bare rock face, so that this ultimate aural obstruction can then be attacked itself. The stone quarry-face thus becomes the site Michelangelo chose for this aural audit. He knew why he was a sculptor. Mass must be eliminated with the hammer, chisel, and claw in order that all distracting lateral reflections and aural obstructions are removed. An aural relationship with the infinite requires ultimate silence, as a setting for aural signification. Only then can qualification of the solid provide meaningful discourse. The cross-hatched lines of drawing become myriad clawed lateral aural reflections focusing on the ear.

Sculpting, Leonardo da Vinci implied, is noisy; painting is to be preferred, as sight is above hearing.⁹⁴ Beyond the tumult of sounds depicted in *The Last Judgement* and the cacophony of the babble of tourists in the Sistine Chapel, is indeed Yeat's Michelangelo.⁹⁵

For Michelangelo it could be that the aural axle spanned the sepulchral world of stone, wherein he sought his young mother, and the living world of his desire for beautiful young men, and affection for friends and colleagues. With all of whom he sought aural discourse concerning the Christian themes of suffering, despair, guilt, fear, and redemption.

If Michelangelo's intimate love relationships had all been physically consummated perhaps his art would look like the contemporary photograph of a gymnasium with its young muscular clients each holding a cell-phone to their ear. Perhaps it does.⁹⁶

Michelangelo's own access code is three rings. Painting, sculpture, architecture. They raise our intellect to heaven.⁹⁷

Levan al cielo nostro intelletto

body have clearly been understood, and experienced, as acoustic phenomena, even though interpretation of his work has, in the main, been restricted to visual and tactile matters. Thus far I have avoided the term acoustic as relating exclusively to architecture. In St. Peter's, aural implications at both personal and collective levels are manifest. Comparison of the enlarged ear in the *Young man with earring* drawing with the *Studies for the Last Judgement*, and the form of St. Peter's, shows the essential surrounding shell of the ear; and in the former, also the forked rib structure and its analogue with the figure of Christ. The crucified and resurrected Christ is also at

the centre of St. Peter's. This correspondence is perhaps subliminal on Michelangelo's part.

Pearson develops a comparable insight into the work and life of the architect Le Corbusier, concerning his crucial preoccupation in his own theory, buildings, and sculpture (in collaboration with Joseph Savina) in which the detailed form of the ear shell is depicted with acoustic plasticity. Le Corbusier's initial concern with radiant form—forms which emit (sound)—developed together with his understanding of forms which listen—listening forms which can reflect, focus, and direct sound by means of open curved surfaces—become

characteristic of his later works, notably the Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut (Ronchamp, 1950-54). The emphasis on curved shells, and the distant embracing forms of mountains and hills, complemented the speaking sculpture he began with: first the Parthenon (like the sound of trumpets he had proclaimed, and, he felt, like a pearl in an oyster shell); then the Palace of the League of Nations (Geneva, 1927-28); Palace of the Soviets (Moscow, 1931); and the sculpture of the Open Hand at Chandigarh. Le Corbusier always understood his radiant, speaking forms to be complemented by the shell-like forms of the surrounding landscape's hills. Perhaps his main concern, unlike Michelangelo, was with speaking—he did not have the burden of Michelangelo's personal aural search for his mother. Le Corbusier exploited the plasticity of concrete for shell forms, just as Michelangelo did the concrete and brick construction of St. Peter's. Pearson argues that an understanding of the acoustical trope in Le Corbusier's work is crucial. Likewise an understanding of Michelangelo's aural sensitivity is crucial to an understanding of his work. Christopher Pearson, "Le Corbusier and the Acoustical Trope. An Investigation of its Origins," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 56:2 (2 June 1997): 168-183.

69. Ackerman, 172 and fig. 74. For plans and perspectives after Michelangelo of the Capitol, see 148-149. It may be fanciful to suggest that Michelangelo's use of the pilaster rising directly from the ground to the parapet, across several individual storeys, implies his impatience to reach his goal of shoulder level, and hence the ear of his mother. The composition of the Capitol can also be compared to the layout of *Studies for the crucified Haman*, with the crucial pivot of the ear at the centre, surrounded by cupped shells of hands and arms as building forms; and (on another sheet) the implicit extended torso of Haman providing the stair of access to this place of auscultation, where the ear at the centre is pressed to the breast. How easily the crouched figures of the *Apostles Sleeping* during Christ's agony in the garden (1550-55) with their aural shell outlines; and the solitary figure curled into its own outline and curling mantle with forked arms across the ears can, in the imagination, be placed under the pedestal of the dynamic figure of Marcus Aurelius at the Capitol's centre.
70. The python at the centre of the Capitol under the statue of Marcus Aurelius is unleashed in *Cleopatra*, connecting breast and ear. Michelangelo surely describes the personal significance of this Capitol composition, and the *Haman* sheet, in the sonnet concluding: "That I may forever embrace, though not for merit of mine, / The breast and throat of my lord / With my unworthy and weary if ready arms." Clements, 125.

In the Capitol design the breast of the wet nurse becomes the ear of the mother-at-the-top-of-the-stair. Here, just as "in the Creation of Adam the languid form of Adam appears to rise from the blue-gray, barren stone mound beneath him" (Liebert, 221), Michelangelo rises to greet his loves. "That dress which fits tightly round her breast, and then seems to flow freely down, is happy as the day is long, and that net made of what is called spun-gold never tires of touching her cheeks and neck. But that happy ribbon of fine gold thread seems to rejoice more fully still, being so arranged that it presses and touches the bosom it encircles. And the simple girdle that twines around her seems to be saying to itself 'Here I wish to clasp forever'. So what then might my arms do?" Sonnet 4 (c.1507) in *Michelangelo: The Poems*, trans. Christopher Ryan (London: J.M. Dent, 1996).

71. Liebert and Bull each explore these themes.
72. The Brazen Serpent pendentive on the Sistine ceiling dramatically asserts this theme. The entwining forms of the probing serpents and massed figures can be compared to *Leda and the Swan*.
73. Following Vasari, Hartt groups several presentation drawings of "Divine Heads," male and female, made in both Florence and Rome (1528-34) for Gherardo Perini and Tommaso de' Cavalieri (259-264). These heads in profile and three-quarter view are underpinned by studies for heads on the Sistine ceiling, notably surviving drawings for *ignudi*. There are also earlier drawings of heads made with the pen (1501-02). These include that of a nude youth in profile with long curling hair swept back from the left ear (fig.16). Hartt believes this youth is also the model for the study for the *Taddei Madonna* (1501-02). The youth surely recurs, with long curling hair, in the profile *Girl holding a spindle*, even though Hartt dates this drawing 1528-34, linking it with a profile on the sheet *Sketches for eyes, locks of hair, profiles* to which he gives the date 1525-31. The drawings are mostly copies, Hartt assumes, by Michelangelo's pupil and assistant Antonio Mini, of an eye, locks of hair, and the profile by Michelangelo. The same profile surely recurs yet again as the highly finished *Female head in profile*, which he dates 1532-34. Is Michelangelo reworking drawings he made in 1501 of a youth, or perhaps just remembering the profile and model, or are some of these drawings dated incorrectly? I wonder if the 1501 youth drawn in profile in these various ways as male and female (figs. 10, 16, and perhaps 311 and 365), is also the figure studied from the rear for the Libyan Sibyl (fig. 87), described by Hartt as a "rugged youth," now ten years older in 1511 and no longer an adolescent. Now he has short receding hair accentuating the high curve of his brow, and

a developed musculature. The ear of the Libyan Sibyl is not inconsistent with that of the *Girl holding a spindle*, indicating the same high pointed ear, as that also of the pen study (fig. 19) which Hartt dates c. 1504. He feels the model for the Libyan Sibyl is the model for the Creation of Adam (fig. 77). If these Sistine figures are all indeed this youth then Michelangelo is accustomed to feminising him. It may even be that the *ignudi* studies of the "impish" model (fig. 106) and the "gentle" and "solemn" model (fig. 107), whose muscular torso is studied in fig. 105, are one person, the same 1501 youth now a young man. A drawing thought to be a study for Leah for the Tomb of Julius II, *Young woman holding a mirror* (fig. 369) could be a frontal view of this young man despite Hartt's date of 1532-34. The sheet is exceptional for including a detailed study of the left ear, one of only three detailed studies of the ear given by Hartt. He does not comment on the detail. The strongly modelled forked rib motif within the ear is clarified in the detailed study and must surely be read in conjunction with the right hand clasping the forked braids of hair extending from the left ear over the head and past the unseen right ear to the breast.

74. "Perhaps the last drawing we possess from Michelangelo's shaking hand." Hartt, 309: *Madonna and Child* (1560-64?). "The figure is, as Thode pointed out, derived from the Virgin in no. 129 [*Christ on the Cross between the Virgin and St. John*]. I don't know of any drawing later than the present one." Goldscheider, *Michelangelo's Drawings*, Fig. 130, *Virgin and Child*. In the penultimate drawing, the Virgin presses her left ear to the solid thigh of her Son on the cross, as he had done, when a child, to his mother's breast, as depicted in Michelangelo's first marble relief. Now, her Son is lifted up, arms outstretched above her, indicating a vast aural shell, within which are her Son's forked arms and legs, like the forked rib structure of the ear. The reciprocal pathos of this auscultation is profound, almost beyond bearing. The parallel lines of the cross echo those of the stair handrail in the first relief. In the last drawing, the ear structure is repeated, with the child, arms outstretched like the forked ribs within the enveloping shell of his mother's arms, dangling his legs like earrings toward his mother's groin whence he came, for this is surely the re-birth scene that puzzled Nicodemus. Thus the shaky outlines of this aural shape echo the first scene of the Sistine Creation, the Separation of Light and Darkness, wherein God's swirling arms above his head are depicted within the enveloping aural shell of his own clothes and surrounding vapours. This configuration is intimated earlier in the sheet of drawings *Sketches and life studies for the Taddei Madonna; Self-Portrait of Michelangelo*

- (1501-2). The child reaches up to his mother's hair and right ear, with both arms swirling around his head, together with the enveloping outlines of his clothes. For all his animation the figure of his mother seems to remain inaccessible, sepulchral, as in his first relief.
75. The letter from Michelangelo to Vasari was prompted by Duke Cosimo, anxious to finish the San Lorenzo Library in Florence. Bull, 368.
76. "Stryzygowski was the first to note the resemblance of the Virgin of the Stairs to the seated women in sepulchral reliefs in antiquity." De Tolnay, *The Youth of Michelangelo*, 128 and fig. 132.
77. Bull, 368. Michelangelo wrote to Vasari: "... first, it is as if you took a number of oval boxes, each about a span deep but not of the same length or width, and placed the largest down on the paving further from or nearer to the wall with the door, depending on the gradient wanted for the stairs. Then it is as if you placed another box on top of the first, smaller than the first and leaving all round enough space for the foot to ascend; and so on, diminishing and drawing back the steps towards the door, always with enough space to climb, and the last step should be the same size as the opening of the door."
78. Liebert, 309-310. The Laurentian Library vestibule columns, recessed into the plane of the wall's foundations for structural integrity, have been considered an extraordinary innovation. Ackerman, 112-113.
79. Bull 368. The composition of the drawing *Pieta* (1538-40) with the outstretched arms of both Mary and Christ, together with Christ's exposed torso, suggest a compositional empathy with the Laurentian Library stair. Opposed in direction, the *Study for one of the dead rising for The Last Judgement* (1534-35) likewise juxtaposes the central upward sweep of the torso, a back view with outrigger arms. A comparable disposition of body elements can be observed within the torso countless times, in which the "washboard" stepped muscles of the stomach are flanked by hip muscles and higher ribs, each side. The sequence is shown fully extended in the crucified Haman, leading to the ear. Similarly in the open torso of the Creation of Adam this analogical pathway leads to the crucial ear turning towards God. The torso as pathway theme is present also in the early drawings *Standing male nude* (1505), and implicit in the marble *David*. The theme continues with late Crucifixion drawings. It is surely a male analogical equivalent to a woman's braided hair as a pathway to the ear. Michelangelo's specific interest in the male body is thus linked to his larger preoccupation with aural access. The human body, intimately perceived in close embrace, is of course an aural-acoustic phenomenon. Thus the significance of these muscle groups of the torso overlaying the organs of the lower torso—liver, kidneys, bowel, stomach—and the heart and lungs of the upper torso, is that whilst on the exterior they provide a stepped approach to the head, at the same time they provide aural access with the acoustic interior of the body. This perception extends the visual and tactile information of the drawings of the body into the aural realm. Michelangelo's "oval boxes" piled one upon another to form the Laurentian Library stair are thus resonant, acoustic forms, like the bodies of stringed musical instruments. These successive resonant chambers are sounded by the foot, and are detached from the walls of the vestibule, which act as reflecting lateral aural shells, cupped on all sides, to receive the footfall sounds of this progress towards Divinity. The straight "wings" of the side stairs are less resonant, more like the rib bones, protecting the cavities between them. Michelangelo is specific in his own writing about treading a steep path to heaven: "Heavy with years, and vexed sore by sin, / Rooted in uses of iniquity, / The first and second death at hand I see, / Yet cherish evil thoughts in my heart within, / Not mine, Oh Lord, the power that I need, / To change my life, my passions, my fate, / Unless Thy light my path illuminate, / And Thou, not I, my steps control and lead. / 'Tis not enough the deep desire to give / For that pure world where, grown divine, the soul, / No more from nothingness shall be created. / Ere thou of mortal garb do her deprive, / Make short the steep path to that heavenly goal. / That brighter hope may on my footsteps wait." Trans. Elizabeth Hall, Clements, 126. Andrew Holleran records this perception of the male torso: "And so he walks past other doors, thinking, Nice Stomach. The hour of the Manatees is never exclusively that; a few young men taking the day off lie patiently in their rooms, waiting for the opportunity to cash in on their beauty. He used to want to climb such a stomach with his tongue, scale it the way rock climbers ascend cliffs, but now he thinks, What is the point?" "Il Paradiso" in Brain Bouldrey, ed., *Best American Gay Fiction 2* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1997), 9.
80. Liebert, 277-286. Giulio Clovio after Michelangelo, *The Rape of Ganymede* (1540?): Joannides, 72-74. Tolnay (50) notes that the rape of Ganymede was considered as a subject to be painted in the lantern of the cupola of the Medici Chapel. The motif serves as an analogue for rebirth on many levels and its possible use for the chapel may well indicate how Michelangelo thought. Michelangelo had linked a stair with his love (1533-34) for Febo di Poggio, punning on *Poggio* (hill, height): "Easily could I soar, with such a happy fate, / When Phoebus brightened up the heights (*poggio*), / Up from the earth I rose with his wings, / And death itself I could have found sweet. / Now he has disappeared from me. ... His feathers were wings to me and the hill the stair. / Phoebus was a lantern to my feet; nor would death then / Have seemed to me less than a marvelous salvation." Clements, 119-120. Clements considers the poem a commentary on the drawings given to Cavalieri viz. *The Rape of Ganymede* and *The Fall of Phaeton*. Arms are a recurring image in Michelangelo's poetry as an image for love and redemption. "Lord, in the last hours / Stretch toward me thy merciful arms, / withdrew me from myself and make me one who may please thee." Clements, 125. Earlier sonnets have Michelangelo as the active partner: "O happy that day, if this is come to pass! / Let time and its hours at some point give pause / And the day with its sun in its ancient circuits, / That I may possess through no merit of mine / My desired sweet lord / In my unworthy but ready arms" (early 1530s); with even more explicit variant lines on the last tercet: "That I may forever embrace, though not for merit of mine, / The breast and throat of my lord / With my unworthy and weary if ready arms." Clement comments "even this attempt to sublimate a great earthly love into one divine is eventually recognized as a sin." (125). The target of breast and throat, reached by means of the arms, is perhaps a crucial insight to Michelangelo's figural compositions.
81. In both a literal and spiritual sense Ganymede is being inseminated by a creature of the wind, as Liebert observes. Ganymede is thus as the vulture of old, inseminated by the wind. Michelangelo's sonnets describing this experience make clear that it is a journey to heaven, thus linking his love for Tommaso de'Cavalieri with his aural search for his young mother. James M. Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 26-28.
82. John 1:1-14.
83. Murray, 232.
84. Inasmuch as Tommaso de'Cavalieri inspired the marble figure of Giuliano de'Medici, then this central figure in Ciampelli's painting, aligned with Michelangelo's monument, is him also (although the painted figure seems older). At the time of the occasion represented Cavalieri would be 44-46 years of age. He died in 1587, aged 65-67 years, twenty five years before Ciampelli painted Varchi's oration.
85. This aspect of the ear as an analogical microcosm can be discerned in the drawing *Chaste Susanna* (1540?). It is astonishingly similar to the Christ Child enveloped in the folds of Mary's mantle in the *Madonna of the Stairs*. Hart notes the recent suggestion that the drawing was originally of a male

- model. Although those orally inclined would perhaps describe the outline of the composition as phallic in shape, the upraised arms again suggest the forked rib within the ear shell. Hartt suggests this is a drawing of the chaste Susanna taking a bath, and can be understood as an allegory of the integrity of the human soul. Undoubtedly some form of desired consummation is depicted here. The ear shell cups the figure's breast with forking folds of cloth. The figure and the enveloping shell become one. The copulating forms of figure and cloth can be compared to Correggio's *Rape of Io*, in which Jupiter is disguised as a cloud, and its companion *Rape of Ganymede*. Saslow, 63-69.
86. Deleuze and Guattari, 171.
87. Hartt, 20.
88. "[T]he mother's face appears for the child to use as a guide in finding the breast." Deleuze and Guattari, 169.
89. Liebert, commenting on the length of time Michelangelo spent in the mountains quarrying stone, suggests "the later retreats to the quarries also represented the search for his lost maternal and nurturing origins. The search was undertaken again and again ... At the deepest level of unconscious thought, the marble face of the mountain represented the maternal breasts." (220)
90. The "severe arm" of which Michelangelo is fearful ("With justice mark not Thou, O Light Divine / My fault, nor hear it with Thy chastened ear: / Neither put forth that way Thy arm severe" (1550; trans. William Wordsworth in Clements, 125 and 151) is that of the Christ of *The Last Judgement*. It is startling to realise that the Christ has effectively the same head (with a slight adjustment towards a three-quarter view) as *Young man with earring* seen from behind. As the Christ figure, traced in reverse from Tityus, is used four times in the presentation of drawings for Tommaso de'Cavalieri, viz. Ganymede, Tityus, Phaeton, and Dreamer, each a ninety degree rotation, perhaps *Young Man with earring* can also be connected with Tommaso de'Cavalieri as Hartt believes, and not to an earlier period. Liebert, 307-309. Both the Christ of *The Last Judgement* and *Young man with earring* are characterised by means of a listening ear.
91. "The light makes the thing appear by driving out the shadows; it empties space. It makes space arise specifically as a void." Emmanuel Lévinas, "A Sensibility and the Face" in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: University Press, 1969), 189. It would seem that Michelangelo's apprehension of beauty had this clearing effect for him. Invariably in his poems beauty associated with light, especially that of the face, burns up all else and leaves him transfixed. Clements, 207-210.
92. The figure of Eleazar (with Matthan) in the lunette above the entrance into the Sistine Chapel is a dramatic example of auroric colouring. White shirted Eleazar's aquamarine hose are lit with magenta reflections, alongside a rose-coloured mantle lined with gold, against a strong lilac background absorbing darker colours into shadow. These characteristic overlays of contrasting colours are a means of depicting light reflections. By focusing on light, solid figures seem spatially active. Could it be that Michelangelo experienced natural landscape largely at dawn and dusk as he went to and from his workplace, with perhaps a glimpse of the coloured sky reflecting in the waters of the Tiber? If so, there is the possibility of considering Michelangelo as a landscape painter despite popular belief to the contrary. Eleazar's head in profile appears to be a precursor, or derivative, of *Young man with earring* except that the strong diagonal of the hair line, echoing that drawing, covers the ear. Positioned on a torso seen frontally, the characteristic tilt of the head, opposing that of the hair line, casts the reverse ear toward the left shoulder, shadow, and the solid stone behind. In *Young man with earring* the obverse ear inclines forward of the open unseen front of the torso. Both ears, seen and unseen, are thus spatially open unlike those of Eleazar.
93. "In as much as the movement of the hand that touches traverses the 'nothing' of space, touch resembles vision. Nevertheless vision has over the touch the privilege of maintaining the object in this void and receiving it always from this nothingness as from an origin, whereas in touch nothingness is manifested to the free movement of palpitation. Thus for vision and touch a being comes as though from nothingness, and in this precisely resides their traditional philosophical prestige. This coming forth from void is thus their coming from their origin." Lévinas, 189. Michelangelo is acutely aware of living at the brink of nothingness. Contemplating death he writes "'Tis not enough the deep desire to give / For that pure world where, grown divine, the soul / No more from nothingness shall be created," trans. Elizabeth Hall, Clements, 126. With increasing age he is also fearful of the "severe arm" of Christ the Judge who could, with one stroke, reduce him to nothingness. Thus light, of the face and eyes, movement of the arm, and hearing (ear) are for Michelangelo inextricably linked. For *The Last Judgement* Michelangelo had the backward sloping wall cut back, reversing this slope forward so that the top of the wall overhung its base by 30 centimetres. Loren Partridge considers this was not to keep the wall free of dirt, as Vasari claimed, but in order to promote "the illusion of a non-existent wall." The figures of the redeemed levitate upward and forward as a consequence, much as the hanging stalactites of an Islamic *muqarnas* portal are suspended in space. This operation involved the chipping away of 62 cubic metres of masonry by hammer and chisel. Loren Partridge, Fabrizio Mancinelli, and Gianluigi Colalucci, *Michelangelo: The Last Judgement. A Glorious Restoration* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 11 and 17.
94. "Leonardo wrote down his ideas about the importance of the visual arts and especially of painting. Sculpture, Leonardo commented, was dirty, dusty and exhausting, and unfit for gentlemen." Bull, 46.
95. "Long-Legged Fly" in *Last Poems 1936-39*. Clements considers Michelangelo refrained from devoting himself to individuals, "avoiding commitment for long to any person, since absorption with that person would waste his time, would dissipate himself and his energies" (134). When he did, to young men "completely and blindly," he did so despite gossip. In a sonnet to Cavalieri he associates the beauty "of some once lovely face" with "passing rumour ringing in my ears" (211). If the beauty of a face had the power to transcend public clamour, to clear away the sound of the vulgar throng, it nonetheless was linked with this distraction. Michelangelo's poems are often an apologia for his love, to reassure the beloved susceptible to gossip. He urges Tommaso de'Cavalieri "to share his Horatian scorn for the vulgar, chattering crowd" (207-209).
96. *Madonna and Child* (1560-64). The extent to which Michelangelo's art can be considered documentation of his emotional life is, of course, controversial and ignored by some. Liebert has attempted an account of Michelangelo's work from this point of view. Michelangelo's emotional experience was clearly exceptionally rich and volatile. Little is known about the friendships and loves of his early life; more about those when Michelangelo was aged 45-60, and thereafter. Clements suggests Michelangelo's public, platonic relationships, such as that with Tommaso de'Cavalieri, may have been a cover for other, simultaneous, more sensual relationships, as that with Febo di Poggio (210). Michelangelo's capacity for affection is considerable throughout his life. His work, apart from presentation drawings to known friends, and designs for other artists, has yet to be organised securely in relation to the sequence of loves in his life.
97. Bull, 341. Many outline drawings of marble blocks for the Medici Chapel show Michelangelo's mason's mark of three interlocking circles, with his initial M in one. This mark would appear to derive from Lorenzo the Magnificent's emblem of three interlocking diamond rings; Robert Coughlan, *The World of Michelangelo 1475-1564* (New York: Time Inc., 1966), 17.