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Fig. 1: Inside Cover of the *Margarita Philosophica*.

“Let us Build a City and a Tower”: Figures of the University in Gregor Reisch’s (1503) *Margarita Philosophica*.

Richard Hudson-Miles

> Ye heavenly Spirits, whose ashy Cinders lie
> Under deep Ruines, with huge Walls opprest,
> But not your Praise, the which shall never die
> Through your fair Verses, ne in Ashes rest:
> If so be shrilling Voice of Wight alive
> May reach from hence to depth of darkest Hell,
> Then let those deep Abysses open rive,
> That ye may understand my shrieking Yell.
>
> Joachim du Bellay, *The Ruines of Rome* (1591: II. 5-8).

In texts like Moore’s (2018) *A Brief History of Universities*, the chronology of the university is understood as a sequence of paradigm shifts. This *bildungsroman* begins with the Christian birth of the university in medieval Europe, then narrates its maturation into a Kantian institution of reason in the early modern period. From this point, the university develops into the research-oriented Humboldtian model of the early nineteenth century. This neo-Platonic origin story lays the ideological foundations for the global universities of today. It also disguises a Western-centrism that erases important antecedents of the university in Verdic, Buddhist, Confucian and Muslim traditions (Peters 2018: 1071). This vague, but nevertheless confident, Hegelian teleology was destabilised in Bill Readings’ still-influential text *The University in Ruins* (1996). For Readings (1999: 54), the Kantian ‘university of reason’ and the Humboldtian ‘university of culture’ have now both degenerated into their negation - the techno-bureaucratic and managerial ‘university of excellence’. This model, which is more precisely the absence of model, dominates the current conjuncture. It also stalls the Enlightenment fantasies of disinterested cultural and intellectual progression which constitute the university Ego-ideal. Cruickshank’s (2019) conclusions are even more pessimistic, identifying a regression into a neofeudalist problematic which drags the university back to the middle ages.

For both authors, the determinant is understood to be the unfettered global expansion of neoliberal capitalism and its consequential ‘economisation’ (Brown 2015) of all aspects of daily life. Such accounts demonstrate how globalisation has rendered the national cultural function of the university meaningless, and the nation state itself redundant. Instead, transnational corporations [TNC’s] control more capital than many nation states (Readings 1996: 40) and act with impunity from governmental regulations. These TNC’s assert more cultural influence through their marketing and publicity than the ideological state apparatuses [ISAs] (Althusser 1971) of post-Althusserian critique. Now, the function of nation states is not to develop political subjects but to manage global consumers. National history and culture ‘are merely variants of one ‘universal’ [...] to be appropriated by “tourism and other forms of commercialism”’ (Readings 1996: 44-5). This depoliticisation means that the university can no longer be easily read as an ISA, nor the institutional form of disciplinary society (Foucault 1977). Instead, they represent micro-articulations of the bureaucratic corporate logic of TNC’s, thus functioning as conduits for the decentered modulation which Deleuze identifies as the defining feature of control societies (Deleuze 1992). The meaning of the university now ‘lies elsewhere, in an economic sphere outside of the political competence of the state’ (Readings 1996: 47). Once, the modernist paradigm idealised the university as a model of rational society. Now, the economised university represents the absence of model, origin, and telos. Readings uses the phrase ‘dereferentialization’ (1996: 167) to refer to this

decentering of the university and the loss of its grand narrative. Instead, the dereferentialized university is run as a bureaucracy and submerged in performative discourses of 'excellence'. Paraphrasing Nick Land (1993), neoliberalism launches 'a convergent unrealizable assault upon the [university idea], whose symptom is the collapse of productive mode or form in the direction of ever more incomprehensible experiments in commodification, enveloping, dismantling, and circulating every subjective space. It is always on the move towards a terminal nonspace, melting the earth onto the body without organs, and generating [...] its coming undone, its deterritorialization' (Land 1993: 479).

To illustrate dereferentialization, Readings briefly turns to the sixteenth century French poet Joachim du Bellay. In particular, his reflections on ancient ruins in the sonnet sequence titled *Antiquités de Rome* (1588), or *The Ruines of Rome* (1591) in English. The source material for this work was gathered during a period spent as French emissary to Rome (1553-7), a position secured on the basis of du Bellay's nobility. His work spoke in particular to the growing enthusiasm for Antiquity within humanist intellectual circles of the sixteenth century (Cooper 1989: 156-7). Readings' cites du Bellay to emphasise how he poetically constructs a prefigurative archetype of French modernity from Roman ruins ('Old Rome out of her Ashes to revive, And give a second Life to dead Decays'). He contrasts this response to the Romantic art of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which approached ruins from a 'subjective attitude of nostalgia' (Readings 1996: 170). For Readings, neither response would seem appropriate toward the simulacra of Greco-Roman architecture decorating the campuses of contemporary universities (Readings 1996: 169). These new Babylons, where neoclassical temples coexist with hastily constructed glass and steel ziggurats, embody Baudrillard's description of 'the generation by models of a real without origin or reality' (1988: 166). Here, the university ideal is now 'legible to us only as the remains of the idea of culture' (Readings 1996: 172).

Rather than nostalgically lamenting lost origin, Readings (1996: 119) encourages us to question how we can 'reimagine the university, once its guiding idea of culture has ceased to have an essential function'. In the first instance, this involves accepting that the university 'no longer inhabits a continuous history of progress, of the progressive revelation of a unifying idea' (129). Then, we must practice an 'institutional pragmatism' which accepts the ruined 'posthistorical university' (119-34) as the space within which we necessarily inhabit as critical academics. Here, in between 'the plenitude of aesthetic sensation (nostalgia) or epistemological mastery (knowledge as progress)' (171), dereferentialization can be experienced as a space of strategic possibility. Freed from the vanitas of a self-appointed world-historic cultural mission, the university instead becomes 'a place where the impossibility of such models can be thought' (1996: 20). Figured as 'the sedimentation of historical differences' (171), rather than the loss of a unifying ideal, the ruins of the posthistical university quickly present 'occasion[s] for *détournement* and radical lateral shifts' (167-8). To underline this point, the Romantic image of the university, ruined or under reconstruction, is the very lifeblood of educational tourism. To seduce lucrative overseas students onto campus, universities engage in all manner of unaffordable expansion projects, rebranding exercises, academic compromises, and false promises of acculturation. Sharing the same space in the petty-bourgeois imaginary, educational tourism can be understood as the economised and posthistorical reprise of the grand tours of classical ruins in the eighteenth century. Pragmatically abandoning Romantic ideals, which form the substance of academic self-delusions and corporate marketing, opens a space for more radical questions concerning 'how we can do something other than offer ourselves up for tourism' (Readings 1996: 172).

Beneath the economised strata of the university, staffed by the functionaries of a revivalist edu-tourism industry, Harney and Moten (2013) have identified a clandestine and criminal 'undercommons' who refuse 'to be either for the *Universitas* or for professionalization' (107). Dereferentialisation, then, creates spaces which 'may harbor refugees, fugitives, renegades, and castaways' (2013: 104). Thus figured, ruins are not only 'the difficult space - neither inside nor outside' (Reading 1996: 171) the university, but also spaces of sanctuary; the university's transient refugee colonies (Harney and Moten 2013: 101). To further define this condition, one can turn again to du Bellay's poetry of exile, loss, and alterity, which is left underdeveloped in Readings' book. In Rome, du Bellay's work represents a meditation on the alienation resulting from forced exile, or an articulation of

'self-imposed exile (that is a desired physical/geographical or even ideological separation) [which] is symptomatic of a need to differ and to negate (that which is being rejected or left behind)' (Melara 1992: 5). For Duffy (2016: 1), du Bellay forwards 'a particular strategy for contemplating the past, present, and future' which negotiates 'Roman pagan past, the current state of Christian Europe, and the eschatological future of one's soul'. A more apocalyptic eschatology is developed by Walter Benjamin, in his ninth thesis on the philosophy of history (2007 [1968]: 257-8). This thesis contains a famous dialectical image of the angel of history, drawn from the central figure in Paul Klee's watercolour *Angelus Novus* (1920). For Benjamin, the eyes of this angel witness what we presume to be historical progress more accurately as wreckage piled irredeemably upon wreckage. The metaphor holds true for both the 'super-adjacencies' (Venturi 1977) and historical non-sequiturs of contemporary campus architecture and the imagined teleology of the neoliberal university university. Between the methods of du Bellay and Benjamin, it is possible to repurpose images from the wreckage of the university ideal as dialectical images which illuminate the present. Similarly, Readings' calls for critical academics to practice an 'endless work of *détournement* of the spaces willed to us by a history whose temporality we no longer inhabit' (Readings 1996: 129). Outlined below is a small contribution to this 'endless work' of *détournement*, based upon one image from Gregor Reisch's Renaissance encyclopedia, the *Margarita Philosophica* (1503).

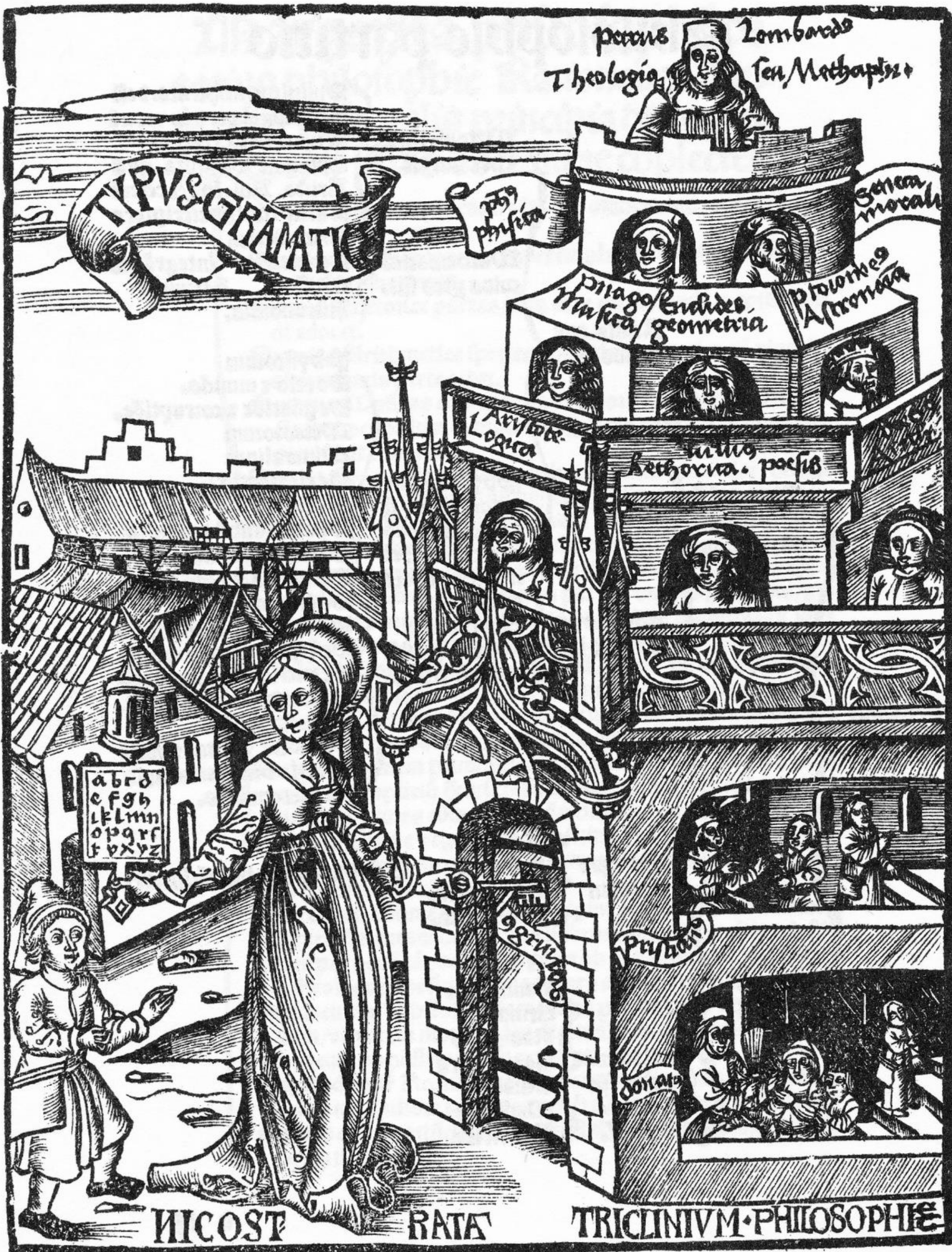

Fig. 2: Image of Grammar [Typus Grammaticae] from the Margarita Philosophica.

THE TOWER OF LEARNING

Reisch's text, known colloquially as *The Philosophical Pearl*, was published in 1503. Reisch was a Carthusian monk educated at the University of Freiburg. The book's structure approximates the curriculum of the universities founded in this period. Like the standard mode of instruction in such institutions, its contents are written entirely in Latin. Sixty years earlier, Gutenberg's invention of moveable type had catalysed the Renaissance by making the mass reproduction and dissemination of literature possible. As a product of this momentum, the *Margarita* presents itself as 'the epitome of all philosophy' (Bateman 1983: 137), and attempts to curate the entirety of the world's useful scholarly knowledge. Evidence suggests that it was intended for use as an educational textbook (Ibid.: 139-40), and it became a staple for both bourgeois autodidacts and European universities. Its popularity meant that it remained in print for at least five decades after publication. Like ghostly palimpsests of the university, many extant editions retain notes scribbled in the margins by past students (Fig. 1). It is also famous today because of the lavish woodcuts which illustrate its contents. Rooted somewhere between poetic rhetoric and philosophical rationality, alongside disseminating the knowledge of the university it also has a fundamentally representative character. Following the principles originally laid down by Aristotle (1961 [350 BCE]), this 'poetics of representation' outlines the principles of fiction, genericity, and decorum (Rancière 2011 [1998]: 44-6), proper to the university ideal. As was common in pedagogical books of this period, it employs the trope of a fictional pedagogical dialogue between a pupil [*discipulus*] and master [*magister*]. Immediately, one can recognise in the *Margarita* a simultaneously didactic and heuristic character, which not only contains the seeds of its own deconstruction but presents readily available material for *détournement*. A much longer work would be necessary to demonstrate how normative rhetorical techniques of *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elecutio*, *memoria*, and *pronuntiatio*, coalesce into a verisimilitude which narrates the founding of the university and validates its authority. Simultaneously, this representative poetics establishes its own internal hierarchies and convenances. One plate from the *Margarita*, in particular, metonymically encapsulates many of these implicit hierarchisations and normative codes (Fig. 2). Ostensibly, this woodcut, which appears within Book I, Tractatus I, page VI, is an 'image of grammar' [*Typus Grammaticae*]. At the same time, it is also an *imago* of the university, at the moment of its becoming-rational. Retrospectively, from a standpoint within the ruins of the university, this image of a proud tower of learning seems almost naively solid and confident. When *détourned*, this image therefore not only speaks critically to dereferentialisization as a black mirror or lost origin, but also as an exemplar of what Lacan (2006: 93) called the 'formative of the function of the *I*' in the mirror stage of infantile development. The impossible and unobtainable completeness of this 'ideal-I' of the university is perhaps the original trauma which continues to haunt its ruins.

This tower is intended to illustrate the importance of grammar, which is one of the twelve constitutive chapters of the book. Other chapters cover the remaining subjects considered essential within sixteenth century higher education. Each is accompanied by its own woodcut. Before any chapter specific illustrations, the woodcut on the title page (Fig. 1) diagrammatically illustrates both the overarching structure of the book and the university curricula which inspires it. As such, it articulates the logic which the tower subsequently translates into bodies, roles, and architecture. This circular composition represents the Trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and Quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy) which formed the core of all medieval liberal arts curricula. Above them presides the higher subjects of the Aristotelian philosophical Tricep - natural, rational, and moral philosophy. The higher subjects are embodied in the figure of a winged female, Philosophia. Beneath her are the seven handmaidens of the Trivium and Quadrivium. Collectively, they embody the desired interdisciplinary synthesis of the liberal arts curriculum. This ideological synthesis continues to be reproduced as the stated *raison d'être* of the contemporary university, despite the instrumental demands of discipline specific research audits, funding restrictions, and faculty rivalries. Interdisciplinarity, whether in the sixteenth or twenty-first century, represents the university's imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of production (Althusser 1971: 162-5).

Beneath its imagined synthesis, this curriculum diagram disguises the institutional entrenchment of what Rancière (2004: 12) has called 'the distribution of the sensible' (2004: 12). For Rancière, this refers to an *a priori* and apparently self-evident discursive field which 'discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it (Ibid.). Similarly, this woodcut (Fig. 1) narrates a common idea of the university whilst also prescribing the 'ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying' (1999: 90) proper to an overarching university ethos which it supports and reproduces. Rancière (2006) has referred to an aesthetics of knowledge which, beyond giving visual form to epistemological modes, designates 'a specific regime of visibility and intelligibility, which is inscribed in a reconfiguration of the categories of sensible experience and its interpretation' (2006: 1). Here, each discipline is not only allocated its proper position within the overarching totality, but taught codes of behavioural and epistemological decorum. Each of the personified disciplines wields a tool, which functions as a metonym for the expected epistemological mode for that subject area. In this sense, the image contains a police function which lays down an implicit law for the university 'that defines a party's share or lack of it' (Rancière 1999: 29). Not only do musicians speak through their instruments, mathematicians through their abacuses and calculations, and so forth, but they can only speak this way if they are to be acknowledged as legitimate components of 'the configuration of the perceptible' (Ibid.). Another aspect of this configuration is that disciplinary knowledges, via their individuating personifications and spatial arrangements, are confirmed as mutually exclusive and hierarchically ordered.

For Rancière, the original image of the distribution of the sensible is Plato's noble lie, from *The Republic* (III 414b-415d; 1974 [375 BCE]: 181-2). Here, class stratification in the ideal republic is justified via an origin myth which insists that the philosopher-kings, or Guardians, were born to rule because they have gold in their souls, and the iron-souled Producer class destined to work. The *Margarita* can be understood similarly as a poetic distillation of the university's own origin story into image and curricula. This mythos persists within the university in truisms that there are poetic or rational, creative or scientific ways of thinking through research questions. Within the audit culture resulting from the concentration and specialisation of knowledge production within the commodified, financialised, and marketised (McGettigan 2013) contemporary university sector, Hall (2018: 117) has argued that the curriculum itself becomes a technology of alienation. Against what Hall calls a 'bounded curriculum' (2018: 122-4) stands what Rancière has described as an 'indisciplinary' (2008, 2006) mode of thought. Indisciplinarity, as the refusal of the disciplinary segregations which underpin the university, must be understood as the opposite of ideological interdisciplinarity and therefore an act of dissensus against what the Edu-Factory Collective (2011) have called 'the system of measure'. Against the university striations resulting from 'knowledge as competition' and 'knowledge as commodity' (Hall 2018: 105-9) indisciplinary thinking is 'non-productive labour' (Readings 1996: 175). Such thought operates in 'the textual and signifying space in which this relation of myth to myth is visible and thinkable' (Rancière 2006: 9), rather than the social cement gluing the alienated university together.

Rather than the implied horizontality of interdisciplinarity, whose striations only become smoothed by genuine indiscipliantiy, post-Derridean and post-Foucauldian scholarship has allowed us to understand that the university was constituted according to an episteme of 'ethnophallogocentrism' (McKenzie, 2001, p.43). The inequalities and structural exclusions which proceed from this logic stubbornly persist within the university today. Given this, the entirely white personification of the *Margarita*'s cover page is perhaps unsurprising, though its feminine character needs contextualising. Thorgeirsdottir's (2020) work shows how the feminine personification of philosophy was a common trope of medieval scholarly texts, evident in works such as Boethius' (c. 524) *The Consolation of Philosophy*. It also reminds us that such depictions are not neutral, but instead inscribe within themselves stereotypes of femininity. Philosophia has been understood to represent the 'nurse', 'the jealous mistress', the 'kind mother and goddess' (Shanzer in Thorgeirsdottir and Hagengruber 2020: 84). In this sense, she is a figure of pure patriarchal fantasy, the imaginary seductress luring potential students into study, or the mother-figure nurturing them through their learning journeys. Personified thus, she also represents the second sex of philosophy (de Beauvoir 2015 [1949]), who is implicitly 'depersonalized as a symbol of

wisdom' (Thorgeirsdottir and Hagengruber 2020: 84). Though feminist scholarship continues to attempt to reinsert the forgotten histories of 'philosopher queens' (Buxton 2020) into the life story of the academy, philosophy remains phallocentric. Whilst patriarchal ideology might envisage aspects of philosophy as feminine, the philosopher remains stubbornly figured as maculine. He 'also can be a father, but more rarely will be a woman or a mother (including in a symbolic sense that could apply just as well to a man)' (Dely 2008).

This ethnophallogocentrism is demonstrated clearly in the *Margarita*'s tower of learning (Fig. 2). Its modern counterpoint might be the Surrealist paintings, such as Dali's (1930) *Anthropomorphic Tower*, or de Chirico's (1913) *The Great Tower*, which repeatedly employed the images of towers as phallic symbols. True to this ethnophallogocentrism, Reisch's 'image of grammar' is staffed, at each level, by a faculty of exclusively white, male pedagogic icons. Each personifies a specific discipline of the Renaissance curriculum. On the ground floor is the Roman grammatician Donatus. The second floor is the domain of advanced grammar, staffed by Priscian. Like the traditional grammar school system, intended to ground students in preparatory Latin for entry into the university, here grammar is imagined as the key which accesses the staircase to the liberal arts above (Hotson 2017). Here, Aristotle represents Logic, Cicero [*Tullius*] represents rhetoric, Boethius stands for arithmetic, Pythagorus music, Geometry Euclid, and Ptolemy Astronomy. Above them natural (Aristotle, again) and moral (Seneca) philosophy. All of this culminates in metaphysics, characterised by the theologist Peter Lombard who presides at the top of the structure. The combination of vertiginous phallic architecture and exclusively male faculty transforms the scene of knowledge production into an explicit fantasy of symbolic masculine power. Nicostrata, the inventor of the Latin alphabet, and the only woman within this scene, stands at the tower's base. In her hands are a hornbook and key. Beyond the doors to which this key unlocks is to the banqueting hall of philosophy, towards which a small child is invited by Nicostrata to feast. This key is adorned with the ribbon of '*congruitas*' - the syntactic agreement or harmony which was presumed to be the basis of all grammar. By extension, Reisch's Tower is not just a synecdoche for grammatical perfection but also the broader ethnophallogocentric *congruitas* of the university. Just like the 'four forms of decorum - natural, historical, moral, and conventional' which Rancière (2011 [1998]: 46) argues become the normative criteria for identifying genius works within the representative regime of literature, here the hierarchical categorisation of academic disciplines is established and their respective founding fathers carved in stone. Against this confident ossification of canonic white European male works, alternate curricula and origins become silenced, unthinkable, even aberrant. This ethnophallogocentric problematic is also evident in the idealised architectural aesthetic of the tower of Learning. This owes little to the university architecture of Freiburg which Reisch would have been familiar with, nor the gothic cathedrals and muralled facades which proliferate that city. Instead, the arches and ramparts invoke the architecture of the University of Bologna, founded in 1088 and claimed as the original research university. More generally, the tower's sturdy symmetry and arched windows revive the language of the Romanesque. However, the compositional reference seems primarily to be the Tower of Babel, represented pictorially throughout the late medieval period as illustrations in the Germanic bibles and church frescos (Fig. 3) with which Reisch was familiar, and in various Dutch and French illuminated manuscripts (Fig. 4) (McCouat 2019). However, the most famous images of the Tower of Babel (Fig. 5), by Bruegel the Elder (1563), was produced half a century after the *Margarita*. Nevertheless, it shares more than an architectural aesthetic with Resich's tower of learning.

The Tower of Babel is a widely recognised, though vaguely understood, old testament origin myth (Genesis 11:1–9), which ostensibly explains the global diversification of language. According to scripture, following the Great Flood, humankind migrated East and settled on the plains of Shinar, giving birth to the city of Babel. Here, settlers vowed to 'build a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens', and to 'make a name for ourselves'. These hubristic ambitions were taken as blasphemous. The heavenly vengeance enacted upon Babel was the deliberate pluralisation of their languages, which had hitherto held them together as one people. Consequently, the city's unity cedes to incomprehension, division is sown through fostering miscommunication, and their collective ambitions falter. By emphasising the potentially destructive effect of a multiplicity of voices, the Babel myth implicitly recentres 'the convivium of 'a harmonious society founded upon Christian values' (Kaminska 2014).

Instead of a potentially heretical and revolutionary *demos*, rising up as a unified people, this is a convivium of deference, consensus, and the status quo.

Kaminska's (2014: 2) excellent essay on Breugel's Babel paintings, to which this current paper owes its title, argues that they function as allegories for the 'rapid and unprecedented processes of economic and demographic growth' experienced in Dutch society of the sixteenth century. As Breugel was painting, the preconditions for the Dutch Revolt and the fledgling Dutch Republic were already evident, including sectarian struggle and a mercantile capitalist boom which would eventually lead to the Golden Age. According to Kaminska, the painting belonged to the Antwerp merchant banker Nicolaes Jonghelinck, and was displayed at his suburban villa, Ter Beke. Here, it would act as a talking point for the leisure classes after dinner. To such audiences, the painting would have been immediately recognisable as social commentary as well as religious allegory. In particular, Breugel's painting would have raised the 'question of how to maintain prosperity in a community characterized by extraordinary pluralism' (Kamisnka 2014: 2). Here, anxieties about multiculturalism are buried beneath images of a unified populace 'building their community, benefitting from each other's skills and abilities' (2014: 6). The iconography of the painting emphasises its function as an allegory of 16th century Antwerp. Firstly, the surrounding architecture closely resembles that which proliferated the suburbs of the Duchy of Brabant. Secondly, the Port of Antwerp, the Tower of Babel is located next to a harbour, source of prosperity and multicultural pluralism. Thirdly, the city is enclosed by walls which resemble Antwerp's Gate of St. George. To complete this list of evidence, Kaminska cites the historical testimonies of visiting monks and diplomats who decried this emergent metropolis of 'foreigners and heretics' as "the great Babylon" (2014: 5). Yet, while the biblical 'Babel moved from unity to disintegration, Antwerp was moving from heterogeneity to consensual harmony' (2014: 7).

Self-evidently, the architecture of Breugel's Babel Tower is designed to connote the triumphal arches and columns of Rome. However, unlike the vanitas images of ruins, popularised in the etchings of Breugel's contemporary Hieronymous Cock (Fig. 6), Breugel's painting depicts an empire rising; an ideological image of capitalist prosperity. Instead of the Colosseum overgrown with weeds, we are presented with an image of the Roman empire being hewn from the *terroir*. Cock's etchings of ruins were intended as vanitas images, like the still lives which proliferated a booming seventeenth century Dutch art market. Such artworks are designed as 'treatises on superfluous things' (Honig 1998), reminding us of the frailty of our existence and the foolishness of a life constructed around commodities and material pleasures. Against such asceticism, Breugel's tower represents, in Lacanian terms (Lacan 2006: 95), the *Ideal-I* of liberal capitalist ideology - a specular image to be jubilantly assumed by the bourgeois and mercantile classes. Similarly, Reisch's tower lays claim upon a university gestalt whose idealised wholeness can only ever be frustratingly illusory. Lacan highlights how a key feature of the mirror stage is the gradual accrual of a sense of 'organic inadequacy' (Lacan 2006: 96-7), a dehiscence between the *Innenwelt* of the ideal and the *Umwelt* of natural reality. It is not surprising that merchant bankers would commission images of multicultural social cohesion to disguise the harmful societal effects of their usury, or to egotistically centralise their actions as the motors of history. Similarly, it is unsurprising that Renaissance male pedagogues would wish to displace formative inadequacies onto the image of a proudly erect tower, symbolising both masculine potency and the Ideal-I of the patriarchal university. The contemporary arms race between university vice chancellors to build spectacular new signature buildings could be understood similarly, as acts which sublimate the desires of their narcissistic libidos. Lacan insists that knowledge is always already imbued with paranoia (Mills 2003: 30). Understood thus, the ruined university, or knowledge-factory, can be understood as a symptomatic image of the 'paranoiac alienation that dates back to the time when the specular *I* becomes the social *I*' (Lacan 2006: 98). These ruins are, simultaneously, images of castration anxiety and a terrifying encounter with the real, against the confidence of the symbolic order.

A contemporary image of this paranoid ruination would be the Baird Point Columns of the University at Buffalo (Fig. 7). These modern facsimiles of Ionic columns once decorated the entrance to the Federal Reserve bank in downtown Buffalo. Originally designed as a 'temple for Main Street in Buffalo', this building was demolished in 1959 to make way for modern headquarters. The site of this self-identifying temple to Capital has been a parking

lot for over sixty years. The columns were rescued by a philanthropic foundation and donated to the University at Buffalo, where they were eventually installed at the southern shore of the man made Lake La Salle. Here, they still serve as a photo opportunity, picnic spot, and backdrop for bands playing Summer festivals. Tracing this precession of simulacra, from original referent in the temples of Rome, to the nostalgic reflections on ruins in Romantic art, to the ideal-I of the university as a temple of culture, and then to a graphic image within the brand identity of the University at Buffalo, one can not only see the gradual degeneration of the university into the hyperreal but also a begrudging acceptance of its ruination. In a footnote, to the penultimate chapter of *The University in Ruins*, Readings (1996: 225) cites a passage from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (2010 [1955]). Here, Freud argues that the wish fulfillment at work in the construction of dreams and fantasies causes them to mix-up and rearrange their source material into 'a new whole. They stand in much the same relation to the childhood memories from which they are derived as do some of the Baroque palaces of Rome to the ancient ruins whose pavements and columns have provided the material for the more recent structures' (2010 [1955]: 530). If Reisch's tower is the ideal-I of the university, then the Baird Point columns represent the wish fulfilment and dream work of the posthistorical university. Rather than mourning the university of reason or culture, Readings encourages us to embrace 'learning from and enjoying the cognitive dissonances that enclosed piazzas and non-signifying campanile induce' (Readings 1996: 129).

Yet, the campanile and ruined columns which proliferate contemporary campuses do signify, in the manner of a return of the repressed. To use Freud's words, these simulacra represent 'wishes of the past which have been abandoned, overlaid and repressed, and to which we have to attribute some sort of continued existence only because of their re-emergence in a dream. They are not dead in our sense of the word but only like the shades in the Odyssey, which awoke to some sort of life as soon as they had tasted blood (Freud 2010 [1955]: 267). Readings' playful cognitive dissonance can be therefore understood more unsettlingly, as a form of the Freudian uncanny. Here, we understand that the university is dead, but continues as undead. Harney and Moten remind us that what they call 'The Undercommons is not, in short, the kind of fanciful communities of whimsy invoked by Bill Readings at the end of his book' (2013: 105). It is, like the university's unconscious, 'always at war, always in hiding' (Ibid.). Beneath the ruination of the university ideal, but against its reconstruction as dream-wish, the undercommons is the 'ruptural and enraptured disclosure of the commons that fugitive enlightenment enacts, the criminal, matricidal, queer, in the cistern, on the stroll of the stolen life, the life stolen by enlightenment and stolen back' (Harney and Moten 2013: 103). Against the harmonious grammar of the university, this rupture is closer to the 'shrieking yell' of du Bellay's undead 'Voice of Wight'. This voice is the siren song accelerating the destruction and submergence of the university ideal. Against the domesticated femininities of the patriarchal university, this siren's voice is issued by what Cixous calls 'the other woman', whose economy can transform directly and indirectly all systems of exchange based on masculine thrift. Her libido will produce far more radical effects of political and social change than some might like to think (Cixous 1976: 882). Here, Philosophia is the not the handmaiden of a deferential convivium or university *congruitas*, but the persistent and dissensual reminder of 'the part of those who have no part' within the neoliberal university. The lost potential of Babel is represented as the result of difference. Yet, in Breugel's painting difference is coopted into an ideological image of the new spirit of multicultural capitalism. The contemporary university manifestation of this is the hegemonic discourses of excellence, which eradicate difference, disguise inequality, whilst quantifying all forms of knowledge production according to commodified schema. Against this neoliberal consensus, the undercommons stands as a voice of the uncanny. This voice 'disturbs the critical going on above it, the professional going on without it, the uncanny that one can sense in prophecy, the strangely known moment, the gathering content, of a cadence, and the uncanny that one can sense in cooperation, the secret once called solidarity' (Harney and Moten 2013: 115). From ruins, these voices gradually coalesce into a creeping crescendo - the non-productive polyphony which de Sousa Santos identifies as the precondition for the post-abyssal university (2018: 277-81).

Fig. 3: The Building of the Tower of Babel, The Bedford Hours, folio 17v (C. 1510-30).

Fig. 4: German Late Medieval (ca. 1370s) depiction of the construction of the Tower of Babel.

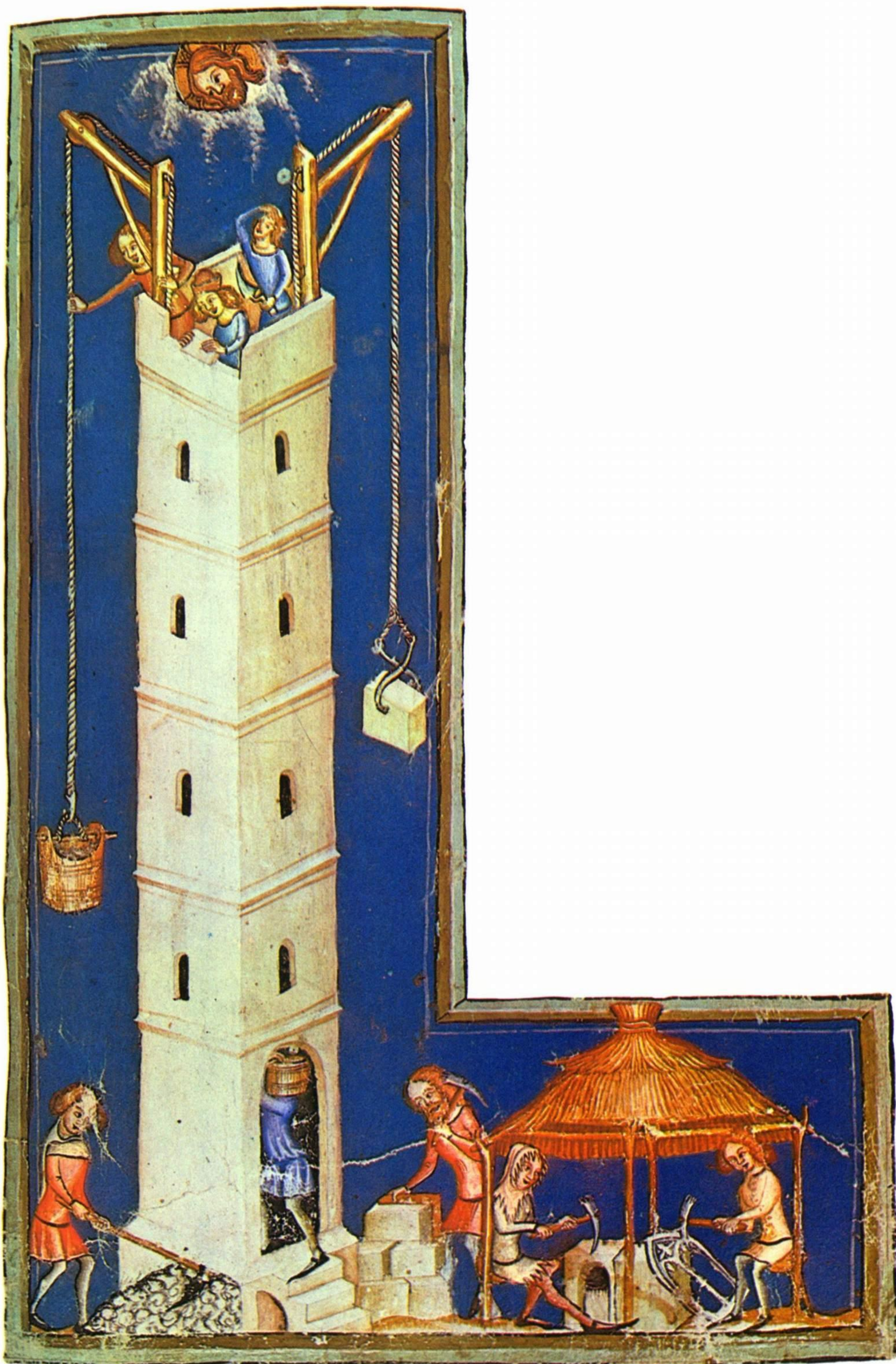

Fig. 5. Pieter Breughel the Elder (1563) The Tower of Babel.

Fig. 6 Hieronymus Cock (c. 1550) Fourth View of the Colosseum.

Fig. 7: Baird Point Columns, SUNY, Buffalo.

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