Unfolding the Architecture of the Imago-Machine

Spatializing Sexual Difference through Arkady Martine's *Teixcalaan* Duology

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Abstract *Luce Irigaray's project of sexual difference is an essentially speculative endeavor—a feminist worldbuilding directed toward an "impossible" future. As such, it lends itself to analysis and development through the shared mode of speculative fiction, a conjunction seldom subject to critical attention. This paper reads sexual difference through Arkady Martine's* Teixcalaan *duology in order to spatialize it, probing the architectures, urbanity, and spatiotemporality of the phallus and Irigaray's two lips. Where the Teixcalaanli Empire exemplifies phallogocentrism, with a rationally ordered panoptic City of spear-pointed architecture, the residents of the independent and peripheral Lsel Station pose an ostensible sexual difference—alongside linguistic and imperial distinction—in corporeally manifesting an Irigarayan* Sex Which Is Not One*, expressed in a consequently heterogeneous architecture: vernacular, impermanent, fluvial and tactile. Moreover, the negotiation of this difference, enabled by the negative space of an irrevocably Other alien, manifests a stirring posthuman testing grounds for Irigaray's triple dialectic, pushing sexual difference into unfamiliar (outer) space.*

Keywords *Luce Irigaray;* A Memory Called Empire*;* A Desolation Called Peace*; SF; Science Fiction; Speculative Fiction; Feminist Architecture; Space Opera*

The Time of Sexual Difference: Reading Irigaray with Speculative Fiction

The future, for Luce Irigaray, has always been at stake from the outset. A philosopher, feminist, psychoanalyst and linguist, her life's work—the philosophy of sexual difference—has a favored tense: the future anterior, "the

only tense that openly addresses the question of the future without … pre-empting it" (Grosz, *Architecture* 147). Writing from the perspective of a future looking backwards is one of the many linguistic strategies Irigaray employs in pursuit of a sexuate philosophy, theory, and writing. This attempt at *écriture féminine*—a writing speculatively bespeaking female sexual specificity—builds upon an insistent and pressing challenge to *phallogocentrism*: contesting man as the sole historical and continued subject in every domain, his phallus the signifier suturing language to rationality, which woman may only ever reflect, an imperfect, empty copy. For woman to have a positive space, and place—an imaginary of authentic, heterogenous difference, linguistic, theoretical, morphological; a new culture, a new ethics, a new society, which accounts for (at least) two subjects—a revolution is required of "the whole problematic of space and time" (*Ethics* 7). The future anterior works as a grammatic parallel to the syntactic-semantic escape from phallogocentrism that her project attempts, Irigaray describing herself as a "political militant for the impossible," demanding "what is yet to be as the only possibility of a future" (*I Love* 10). Sexual difference is both literally and figuratively penned in a future tense: speculatively casting forth an imagination of woman, heterogenous; while grammatically casting back as if this speculation, this future state, has been met, in adroit critique of our present.

Irigaray's revolutionary project, thus, is dual: a critical diagnosis of the storied and unceasing elision of the Other, in philosophies both ancient and contemporary, and a productive projection of this difference forward in time. What would it mean if woman's lips, rather than man's phallus, served as the morphological basis for thought and philosophy, privileging fluidity, plurality and touch as opposed to solidity, singularity and visuality? If a placental economy of relationality and interdependence took the place of a patriarchal economy of ownership? If the maternal relation—as font of all life, all difference—were privileged, rather than repressed? (Not as a hierarchical *replacement*, but as a *complement* such that sexual *difference*—not crude similitude—may be appropriately preserved?) And how, this paper inquires, might these shifts change how we think about space, place and architecture?

While Irigaray's criticism has become a mainstay of feminist critique, her speculative, sexuate ontology was dismissed as mere biological essentialism upon its reception to the Anglophone academy in 1985, social constructivism suspicious of her central recourse to the body. With the recent New Materialist return to ontology, alongside the broader ontological and elemental turns in the last two decades, however, this side of her work is beginning to see seri-

ous reappraisal within feminist scholarship and beyond; particularly with respect to embodiment, her scholarship remains one of the few serious and indispensable theorizations of the vulva. Her contemporaries were nevertheless quick to point out that the critical work ostensibly precluded these latter more experimental speculations—"If specular logic dominates all Western theoretical discourse," Toril Moi inquires, neatly summarizing the bind, "how can Luce Irigaray's doctoral thesis escape its pernicious influence?" (138). Her proponents—those who seek to maintain not only the criticism but the productive speculation too—have taken this bind seriously. Drucilla Cornell suggests that it is "feminine writing" and "language"—*écriture féminine*—and critically the *literary* that may allow a movement beyond phallocracy, "in its power to evoke, and indeed to challenge, the very conventions of intelligibility which make us 'see' the world from the viewpoint of the masculine" (185). Yanbing Er accords: it is "the unknown futurity inaugurated by the trajectories of sexual difference"—its speculative aspect—which "demands a dimension of inquiry that is inevitably aesthetic" (369). Literature, in other words, has the potential to *estrange* and *defamiliarize* our present—to imagine bodies, and cultures, and rationality, otherwise, organized around a different metaphysics; absent of, or in fantastical competition with, the phallic contemporary. Fiction offers a place for this impossibility; *speculative* fiction grants the future tense from which to look back, anterior.

It is remarkable, then, that precisely speculative fiction—not only the privileged genre of critical theory *per se* (Freedman), but the very literature of (cognitive) estrangement (Suvin)—appears in neither Cornell nor Er's account, and is almost absent altogether from scholarship on Irigaray. It is not that the two areas never meet: her theories make for fruitful interlocution with all speculative fiction imagining "female sexuality and female bodies in altogether different terms" (James 35), as in Laurel Bollinger's considerations of the placental economy in Octavia Butler's work. There has, however, been an astonishingly slow uptake of the *reverse*: reading Irigaray and sexual difference with and through such speculative fictions. This is presently the almost sole purview of Anna Bunting-Branch's superb doctoral thesis, where she astutely argues for the use of speculative fiction as a methodological approach to Irigaray's oeuvre, both as it "allows the speculative question of sexual difference to unfold in spacetimes other than those already subjected to dominant logic" (24), and because speculative fiction is a mode poignantly consonant with Irigaray's project:

> From her evocation of future horizons and alternative realities, to her interrogation of the relation between subject and world, and the shifting scales from microcosmic to the macrocosmic, the rhetoric of Luce Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference has deep resonance with the epic scope of the science fictional imagination. (201)

Tracing these resonances—thinking sexual difference *with* speculative fiction—allows us to highlight and interrogate imaginative repositories which may yet prove critical for the real implementation of sexual difference in our time. It is not enough to demand the impossible, nor to theorize that sole point of impossibility at a distant remove from the present; one must also be able to imagine its enactment, to identify the possible praxes such imagination demands.

Treading in Bunting-Branch's methodological footsteps, this paper turns to Arkady Martine's *Teixcalaan* duology as a prime site for Irigarayan intervention due to its central focus on *difference*—colonial, corporeal, species, and, I will argue, sexual too. A tale of imperialism at galactic proportions, the first novel navigates politicking in the City at the heart of Empire, while the second ventures to its outermost peripheries to negotiate with an existential alien threat. An Irigarayan lens is fruitful to analyze the novels—protagonist Mahit's struggle to imagine language and indeed existence beyond complete Imperial infiltration profoundly mirrors Irigaray's own struggle in imagining language and subjecthood beyond the male. Reading backwards, employing the novels as lens to analyze sexual difference, is even more productive: the Teixcalaanli Empire and Mahit's diminutive peripheral republic, Lsel Station, appear to profoundly instantiate both a phallocratic and an Irigarayan, labial logic respectively, with corporeal and, I suggest, spatiotemporal distinction in tow, allowing a poignant glimpse into how a woman's culture, in Irigaray's figuration, could function. Moreover, the duology's posthuman elements push sexual difference beyond the biological, which has traditionally been a site of friction for the full embrace of trans subjectivities and the extension to other realms of difference. Here, then, the practice of speculative *fiction*—free to imagine impossible corporealities and cultures—may critically inform Irigaray's practice of speculative *nonfiction*, imagining a sexuate culture perhaps similarly impossible, and yet, in her mind, the only possibility moving forward.

This paper proceeds by practicing Irigaray's sexuate imaginary in order to multiply emplace it: firstly, within feminist architectural studies, unpicking the spatial ramifications of the two lips; secondly, within the figurative, literary

space of Arkady Martine's *Teixcalaan* duology, examining how the speculative corporealities of sexual difference may be literalized; thirdly, within the literal space of these novels, reflecting these bodies and their metaphysics; and finally, in the negative, third space of the triple dialectic, Martine offering a model for relating in difference on the body of a literal (alien) negative. By placing sexual difference into this space (opera), I argue, we may derive critical insight into the precise workings of this impossible space-time that we must militantly pursue.

The Space of Sexual Difference: Emplacing the Two Lips

As the sole subject, man is naturally, metaphysically privileged, the teleological arrow of progress, *time*—active, forceful, rational—in dualistic tension with *space*, denigrated accordingly as the dark chaos of abject irrationality, a passive territory in need of penetrative exploration, domination, and order, woman's grand lot. "Over and over again," Doreen Massey writes, unpicking this intertwining of sex and space, "time is defined by such things as change, movement, history, dynamism; while space, rather lamely by comparison, is simply the absence of these things" (257). Space, at least prior to the spatial turn, occupies the same position as woman: only referentially, oppositionally defined, it "morphologically reproduces the passive attributes of femininity" (Grosz, *Architecture* 159). This is the backdrop for Irigaray's revolutionary call:

> The transition to a new age requires a change in our perception and conception of *space-time*, the *inhabiting of places*, and of *containers*, or *envelopes of identity*. It assumes and entails an evolution or a transformation of forms, of the relations of *matter* and *form* and of the interval *between*: the trilogy of the constitution of place. (*Ethics* 7–8)[1]

The future is what is centrally at stake here; space, time, and place must be rethought and reconfigured in order to recognize and produce woman's sexuate difference, to cultivate a new culture of respectful heterogeneity. Work in feminist architecture—the discipline taking Irigaray's spatial concerns most seriously—has done much to evidence the mutually implicated fates of woman and space: how "space is produced by and productive of gender relations" (Rendell 102), and how accordingly, the (literal) "man-made environments which

1 All emphases in original unless otherwise noted.

surround us reinforce conventional patriarchal definitions of women's role in society and spatially imprint those sexist messages on our daughters and sons" (Weisman 6). *Sexuate* emancipation thus requires *spatial*, *architectural* emancipation, both physically—Le Corbusier famously designed for the privilege of a dashing, six-foot-tall British policeman—but also metaphysically: "Western architecture is, by its very nature, a phallocentric discourse: containing, ordering, and representing through firmness, commodity and beauty" (Bloomer 13).

That architecture, and its attendant space, has been organized around those masculine properties inhering in the phallus—"Production, property (proprieté), order, form, unity, visibility, erection" (Irigaray, *Subject of Science* 77; see Bullock); the apotheosis of this economy of presence and (re)presentation in the skyscraper—is thus no surprise, not least in recalling Moi's contention that phallogocentrism inescapably conditions every aspect of our existence, be it philosophical *or* spatial. Mary McLeod works this bind in conversation with Irigaray: "[C]an you create different games—new forms and spaces—if your very existence is denied?" (186). So that woman might be afforded difference spatially, she requires an elaboration of difference *at all*, McLeod indicating that this may emerge through practicing Irigaray's imagination—Irigaray's project is, after all, fundamentally an attempt at emplacement, "to (re)discover a possible space for the feminine imaginary" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 165). As Cornell before me, I suggest that it is Irigaray's 1977 prose-poem "When Our Lips Speak Together" that might most powerfully perform and cultivate this heterogenous, female sexual difference, the morphological qualities of these two lips in turn tentatively informing speculations on sexuate spatiality in the work of her architectural proponents.

Playful, amorous—in a distinctly lesbian mode, unusual for her acutely heterosexed corpus—"Lips" is perhaps the most enduring passage of Irigaray's writing, a speculative and lyrical attempt to speak (as) woman, touching upon a myriad of her foundational ideas. Forwarding the lips as an alternative linguistic resource to the phallus—the two pairs of vulval labia serving for sexuate specificity,[2] while the pair of facial lips makes clear the tether to language—the poem structurally performs its metaphysical intervention. A dialogue at once between a woman and herself in self-affection, and between two sapphic lovers, floundering beneath the discourse of phallogocentrism

2 It is a deep irony that this very specificity is frequently erased by an anatomical misunderstanding of the vulval lips as "vaginal," in Carolyn Burke's original 1980 translation most egregiously (see Irigaray, "Lips" 72), but persisting in contemporary scholarship.

that leaves no space for her/their body, it melds the plural and the singular, never coalescing around one or the other, fluid, elusive and emergent, openly rejecting, indeed, any attempt at pinpointing a singular truth: "Why only one song, one speech, one text at a time?" Irigaray demands (of herself, her lover, the (male) audience)—"To seduce, to satisfy, to fill one of my 'holes'? With you, I don't have any. We are not lacks, voids awaiting sustenance, plenitude, fulfillment from the other. By our lips we are women" (*This Sex* 209–210), by our lips more than mere empty space, than Freudian *unheimlich*.[3] Taking the morphology of the lips—strictly: neither one nor two; always in (erogenous, tactile) contact; one always moving with the other—Irigaray experimentally unfolds a metaphysic in conscious abjection to the phallic. Where the phallus models a clear singularity, visually imposing ("castration anxiety" is a specular fiction, the gaze always at stake), the lips model multiplicity, plurality, multiple pairs in simultaneous contact; where man requires "an instrument to touch himself with: a hand, a woman, or some substitute" (*Speculum* 232), the lips are autoerotic; where the phallus sharply distinguishes between the self and the Other, the subject and the object, a stable either/or, the lips are always fluidly in contact with another, a subject rippling against and with another subject, both/and:

> We—you/I—are neither open nor closed … Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth. One is never separable from the other. You/I: we are always several at once. And how could one dominate the other? impose her voice, her tone, her meaning? One cannot be distinguished from the other; which does not mean that they are indistinct. (*This Sex* 209)

The lips are not the *opposite* of the phallus (hence, indeed, their absence in Freud, to whom, in an implacable logic of the Same, woman's castration precludes vulval differentiation). Nor are they the phallic complement—her sheathe to his sword; her weakness to his strength; her space to his time—it is not the *vagina* which is at stake, nor the womb, those spaces to be filled, in which man may reach his climax, may (re)produce himself. They are, rather, what is most *abject*, or most *impossible*: a relation between two *subjects*, without domination, sublation, or foreclosure; a *plurality*, contained within one body, one sex, that is yet *not* one, nor simply two, but multiplicitous; and a *fluidity*,

3 That is, than mere uncannily castrated men, a horrifying reminder of this threat.

in constant becoming, without teleology—"[t]hese rivers flow into no single, definitive sea. These streams are without fixed banks, this body without fixed boundaries. This unceasing mobility"; a "flux, never congealing or solidifying" (215).

Meaning is different, here. Woman's fluvial current "is multiple, devoid of causes, meanings, simple qualities" (215)—the transcendental is no longer to be found in erection, intellection, the rational solar aspect greeting man's emergence from Plato's cave. "Stretching upward, reaching higher, you pull yourself away from the limitless realm of your body," Irigaray insists, pleading: "Don't make yourself erect, you'll leave us. The sky isn't up there: it's between us" (213). Meaning becomes not a private, solitary pursuit, but an embodied exchange, ontology itself defined by relationality; Irigaray pushes us to look not solely at what separates us (from the animal, from the Other, from our body), what distinguishes us, what esteems us—immaterially; rationally—but to recognize, instead, that *we* are always and ever a product of *you/I*. This is clear in a more linear sense through the mother, and birth, but such relationality inheres in a more dynamic sense within the movement of the two lips; always touching, indistinguishable, and yet not indistinct, the lips act as a model for the inextricably interlinked plurality of any being, presaging the posthuman turn in which humans are now recognized not as neatly singular and strictly bordered subjects, but as more-than-human assemblages, the cells of our bodies numbering more bacterial than human. We are, as the lips, "not one. Especially not one. Let's leave *one* to them: their oneness, with its prerogatives, its domination, its solipsism: like the sun's" (207). Woman is not the darkness, for Irigaray, where she sees Plato in the light—she is not man's *opposite*, plainly irrational and chaotic—it is simply that her luminosity "is not violent. Not deadly. For us the sun does not simply rise or set. Day and night are mingled in our gazes. Our gestures. Our bodies" (217). The sun isn't up there, a steep and rugged ascent, it's between us; a sensuous, "solar flesh …, [f]lowing between—the two" (*Elemental* 44). In Irigaray's figuration, there is space for a *sensible* transcendental—the womb, always anterior to illumination; lips always touching, out of sight.

Tethering this speculative, metaphysical imagination back to our central focus upon place and physical praxis, the spatial ramifications of "Lips" are abundant. To stay with Plato a moment longer, Irigaray questions whether his failure to emplace form and numbers—and Aristotle's failure to properly address the same—manifests a "duality of place, on the one hand, and ideas and numbers, on the other," symptomatic of the "divorce between masculine and feminine[:] In order to overcome the attraction for the first and unique place,

does man, at his best, practice with ideas and numbers as independent from place?" (*Ethics* 39). Linking man's erasure of his maternal origins to a valorization of rationality on one hand and a forgetting of place on the other may seem convoluted (even if Irigaray is wont to forward womb-as-dwelling, e.g. *Elemental* 49), but it becomes profound in the parallel one may make to "that process of annihilation of space through time that has always lain at the center of capitalism's dynamic" (Harvey 293), of the neoliberal city, understood as a *phallocratic* move. This manifests in the construction of cities from a god's-eye view, servicing the spectacle, privileging sight against all other senses; the proliferation of non-places and abstract space, de-individuating (or: *objectivizing*) urban dwellers; built after fixed, military geometry, symmetry, an architecture of rationality, not of humane differentiation; and of a temporal mode "through history rather than through duration, as that to be preserved, as that which somehow or provisionally overcomes time by transcending or freezing it" (Grosz, *Architecture* 111), monumentalizing. The reciprocal urban imbrication with sexual difference *per se*, "the condition and milieu in which corporeality is socially, sexually, and discursively produced" (Grosz, *Space* 104)—bodies and architecture "mutually defining" (108)—is provocatively opened by "Lips:" the possibility for *new* forms, and *new* spaces.

Writing in critical conversation with Irigaray, Grosz probes such an architecture beyond phallogocentrism—an architecture precisely of *duration* and not *history*, of "dynamism and movement rather than stasis or the sedentary," in service of "becomings of all kinds" (*Architecture* 71). Not fixed or unitary, Grosz's conception of architecture is *processual*, conceiving space as "open to whatever use it may be put to in an indeterminate future, not as a container of solids but as a facilitator of flows" (165). The labia are evident in this fluidity, this challenge to fixity; the dwelling, as the body, without fixed borders, without teleology; not wholly open or closed, but in a process of becoming foreclosing neither from the outset, imposing no singular, selfsame spatial truth; not a monument to time, to gaze upon, empty and evacuated of all spatial texture, but one that recursively and sensuously develops the bodies within, a subject unto itself. Each of these facets resonates with the most powerful architectural image in "Lips": "Between us the house has no wall, the clearing no enclosure, language no circularity …—we are never finished. If our pleasure consists in moving, being moved, endlessly. Always in motion: openness is never spent nor sated" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 210). An irony here is the astonishingly contradictory spatial imaginary Irigaray develops in her own, single disciplinarily architectural essay, "How Can We Live Together in

a Lasting Way?", which Peg Rawes (*Sexuate Architectures* 302) astutely critiques not only for its failure to meaningfully build upon feminist architectural criticism but because its central "proposition of dividing the home into two separate spaces"—one for him (with technical, angular, metallic accents) and one for her (sentimental, warm and rounded)—is "a troubling continuation of a binary spatiotemporal logic," fixed and bordered, contravening the revolutionary morphology of the lips and mundanely (hetero)sexist (a criticism justly levelled at much of Irigaray's wider oeuvre; one glimpses here why). While her intention is laudable—protecting (particularly woman's) sexual specificity against foreclosure and sublation through guaranteeing each sex a space of their own—it is evident that the move from the metaphysical to the physical, from speculative spatiotemporal *imagination* to its actual architectural *practice*, is not straightforward. Rawes (*Sexuate Architectures*) and Andrea Wheeler offer respectively compelling concrete examples but do so only in brief; the need for deeper interventions, such as this paper, is thus clear. Rawes's 2007 *Irigaray for Architects*, the core architectural treatise on Irigaray's thought, remains solely theoretical: keenly foregrounding the need to move beyond "quantitative intellectual representations of boundaries and volumes, insides and outsides" (55), and to attend rather to "movement, time, fluidity, flow and the actual material transformation of space" (39). Critical here is her emphasis that with the dynamism, debordering, and fluid, subject-subject relations one may learn from the lips, a different kind of architecture might not only be sculpted but *practiced*, too, dehierarchizing this structurally phallocentric profession.

"Lips," then, takes up the clarion call of *écriture féminine*—that woman must write herself, from and through her body—to produce a new discourse, which in turn might produce a new architecture, a new way of doing architecture, spatially and temporally suited to female sexual difference. It does this wise to the phallogocentric bind. Towards the end, in an aside that is a paragraph all its own, Irigaray entreats her/self not to weep: "Don't cry. One day we'll manage to say ourselves," she insists, "[a]nd what we say will be even lovelier than our tears. Wholly fluent" (*This Sex* 216). Here the speculative, the corporeal, and the lingual coalesce: sexual difference, in Irigaray's writing, is an embodied, future language. Arkady Martine's *Teixcalaan* duology, then—a future governed by the leitmotifs of corporeality and language, with a lesbian relationship at its center—ought to be a poignant means through which to further expand and negotiate this philosophy.

Sexual Difference in Speculative Space-time: Arkady Martine's *Teixcalaan* Duology

In the Teixcalaanli language, "the word for 'world' and the word for 'the City' were the same, as was the word for 'empire'" (*Memory* 22). Language and (urban) space are married from the outset of Arkady's Martine's *A Memory Called Empire* (City; World) and *A Desolation Called Peace*, not least eponymously, reflecting the author's career in city planning and Byzantinism. The former novel takes place in the metropole, following Mahit Dzmare, the new ambassador for Lsel Station, whose first glimpse of the City (World; Empire) stages Teixcalaan in what we may describe as *(meta)physical phallocracy*: as she journeys from the skyport to the palatial Inmost Province by groundcar—"more of a city-within-a-city than a palace" (*Memory* 29)—the urbanity outside presents "a blur of steel and pale stone, neon lights crawling up and down the glass walls of its skyscrapers" (29). This spatial imagery is framed by the recitation of a "seventeen-thousand-line poem which described the City's architecture" (29), titled simply *The Buildings*, and elocuted by Mahit's cultural liaison, and later lover, Three Seagrass ("Reed" for short).

There is much to unpack in this opening scene. Starting in reverse, with imperial onomastics, personal naming convention requires a numeric portion appended to "an inanimate object or a piece of architecture" (51). This number, we learn, is often chosen with a classically philosophical and spiritual view of geometry: "Threes are supposed to be stable and innovative, like a triangle" (51), a number and symbol historically tethered to divinity and the male subject, from ancient Greece on (see Dörhöfer). A dehumanizing naming practice, constructing a rationally orderable similitude at the cost of individuation and difference, it evidences an implacable logic of the masculine Same, resurrecting the Platonic and Aristotelean divorce of the numeric (as male intellection) from place (abject female chaos). An embodiment of the Empire's (City's) broader fetishization of geometry and mathematics, language use is inflected in tow; *The Buildings* is not merely an epic, canonical poem, but one doubtless constructed in the precise metrical scheme suited to the genre of narrative poetry, inordinately (if not prohibitively) complex—a far cry from the fluid prosaic verse of "Lips." Poetry serves imperialism in the duology: culturally ubiquitous, politically powerful, and interpersonally prestigious, it is a forum for politician and citizen alike, and one never too far from violence, even at its most playful; at a banquet to the Emperor Six Direction, Mahit, witnessing informal poetic play, comes to the description not of "a poetry *contest* but a battle of wits"

(182). That it is precisely this context in which she feels most alienated, most *alien*—*Teixcalaan* considers only its own citizens as people, denigrating all others as "barbarians"—is unsurprising, rooted in that very first scene of poetry in motion through the window of the groundcar: the City (Empire) "a collapse between narrative and perception" (30), or, one might suggest, between poetry and spectacle; a convergence of history, time, intellect, and the gaze most appropriately understood as *phallogocentric*. *The Buildings* is (and are) phallocratic; Mahit finds herself *discursively* excluded, a "destitution in language"—in space, culture, *logos*, we might add—"that connotes her as castrated, especially as castrated of words" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 143, 142), defective and subjectively incomplete in a way acutely comprehensible through an Irigarayan lens.

A reading of Teixcalaan as phallocratic is simple enough to evidence: take the emperor, Six Direction, whose name alone configures him in genealogy with time's teleological arrow. For the Empire (City), however, this symbolism manifests in the adjacent—and psychoanalytically richer—obsession with *spears* ("*anyone* could understand how *spear* could be interpreted in a multitude of ways" (*Memory* 445)): the sun-spear throne; "vast spearpoint ships" (*Desolation* 389); "tall oppressive spears of buildings" (*Memory* 331); the spear is indelible, inescapable, obvious. The Emperor's last words, before sacrificing himself to guarantee prudent political succession—the custodianship of Nineteen Adze—are a verse Mahit and Reed co-wrote: "*Released, I am a spear in the hands of the sun*" (438). Not merely phallic, it is this incessant fusion of the morphological with the metaphysical that we may identify as phallogocentrism: the *sun* spear, the full violence of Plato's solar; the Empire (City) suturing the phallus to the rationality of the sun to numbers to mathematically obtuse poetry to the economy of presence in skyscrapers, thrones, spaceships, everything in Teixcalaan a (re)presentation of *man*, a monumentalization, a *canonization*, of his sole subjective *direction*, geometrically precise. This same logic perforates every scale: the mathematical meets the corporeal in the Six Outreaching Palms, Teixcalaan's military establishment, "fingers stretched out in every direction to grasp the known universe and reach its farthest edge" (97), an evident logic of spearpoints, of direction, 'grasping' the known universe with rational imperial mind as much as fist. Scale further down: the Sunlit, the City's (Empire's) police, gleam in identical facelessness and voice to occlude all differentiation, controlled by the AI that is the City (Empire), seeing not with human eyes but camera eyes. The Sunlit are enrobed in the phallic specular economy, onomastically, literally; draped in shimmering gold, they service the gaze twice over. Their plurality—an 'individual' uses 'we,' not 'I'—might

suggest a metaphysical rupture (a plausible threat, that is, to phallic singularity), but their objectivization and complete lack of differentiation fix them firmly in a phallocratic logos, a unity of *objects*, not a multiplicity of speaking *subjects*—only two, that is to say, *never* one (though their existence does, in *Desolation*, proffer the speculation of metaphysical difference in the alien). Further still, to the individual scale: Teixcalaan's patently phallocratic logic becomes a literal logic of the Same in the nigh ubiquity of cloning, the complete repression of the maternal; we see here sexual difference utterly foreclosed in that most defining loss, the central phallic urge of (re)presentation literalized. Here we circle back to the top: the emperor's intended successor, in wait to take the throne from Nineteen Adze's stewardship, is his 90% clone, the male Eight Antidote.

It is worth noting here that Six Direction and Eight Antidote are two of the only male characters of relevance, and that, with sparse exceptions, those that matter invariably die, or lose their self (Yskandr, Six Direction, Twelve Azalea, Twenty Cicada). The novels, one ought to make clear, are not *sexist* in a traditionally misogynistic sense (nor cissexist, home to apparently a plurality of genders), indeed cloning liberates women from the labor of reproduction, helping them populate practically every position of power, including Emperor under Nineteen Adze. The predomination of women across the duology, however, should not be mistaken as a signifier of heterogenous, sexual *difference*. Teixcalaanli women are sexually *in*different to the men: the language of politics, poetry, geometry, imperialism, space, the reproduction, is the same. Teixcalaan, rather, maintains what we might call a profound *metaphysical* inequality, even where physical aspects are ostensibly mitigated—the phallogocentrism of empire occludes difference *per se* in its dominating logic of the Same; the ubiquitous sun-spear directed toward rational violence, nary a trace of solar flesh. What is at stake, then—for Mahit, and crucially for Irigaray too—is the *possibility* of difference: "spaces of language that let a person like her imagine Teixcalaan and still be a Stationer. The idea that there might be something other than Teixcalaan, when one said the word for *world*" (*Desolation* 409). Spaces of language that let a person like her imagine philosophy and still be a woman. The idea that there might be something other than man, when one said the word for *subject*.

Back to *The Buildings* speeding past, erect, canonized. While Reed improvises where some few have changed, it is evident that Teixcalaan is dominated by the twin phallogocentric temporalities of the "acceleration of time" (57) and time as *history*, architecturally and otherwise, refusing "to let anything

rot—people or ideas or … or *bad poetry* … Teixcalaan is all about emulating what should already be dead" (*Memory* 293). Each building becomes a literal monument to the gaze, space determined by a centrally specular economy—the City (Empire) is designed for an "Emperor's-eye view" (433), coherent only to he who is removed from it, insensate, and looks upon it. The result is an urbanity designed to contain dissent: provinces fan out in Parisian fashion from the fortified center, with undesirables sequestered far out, so they may be locked down at safe palatial remove. Spectacle above and border below, any relationality, any spatial fluency, is eradicated by the skyscrapers' loom, "tall oppressive spears of buildings, swarming with identical windows," a veritable "spear-garden" (*Memory* 331), in tow with the glassen walls, "irising open and shut" (308–309) for whom the City (Empire) deems visually and algorithmically acceptable, always watching. That the City (Empire) is designed for the privilege of *only* that one, most phallic of senses—sight—and in direct contravention of the abject other, most labial sense—touch—becomes literalized at a point of crisis, Reed warning Mahit: "Don't touch the City [Empire, World]" (92). Its transparent walls, crawling with "gold poetry and blue shimmering light" (92), are electrified. This fuses, again, the sun, language, violence, the gaze, a profoundly phallogocentric opposition to the centrally Irigarayan impulse of *touching the world* (or city). A spearpoint of buildings, a spatiality of stark division, arranged militarily, and appealing and engrossed entirely in the gaze, Teixcalaan answers Irigaray's earlier query on numbers and place: overcoming the primordial place of the womb in cloning, the Empire (City) does not cultivate a place *distinct* from ideas and numbers, but in fact *evacuates* place of all sensuous texture *through* these ideas, these numbers. Space, in the Teixcalaanli apotheosis of phallogocentrism, only serves the (military) spectacle—"the strategy table which was the City and the palace" (312)—the now non-space of the womb mirroring the homogenizing, predominating non-place of its urbanity.

Let us now move to our contrast, Lsel Station, a republic at the edge of Teixcalaan's knowing grasp and Mahit's home, populated by a different kind of human, and embodying, in its brief sketches, an ostensibly different kind of spatiality. A miniscule space station only a few miles around and with but thirty thousand or so residents, the Stationers developed the 'imago-machine' such that they might continue to survive independently. The imago-machine allows the uploading and implanting of recordings of individuals, their consciousness, with all their knowledge and skills. One must be closely matched in aptitudes, in tow with lengthy psychological training (sexed difference is no param-

eter for exclusion, with Mahit matching her male predecessor, Yskandr), but in essence, a line of professions is created: a budding pilot matches with a fitting imago of a previous generation of pilot, everyone ending up with many generations of consciousness within them, integrated into them. Yskandr's imago is both many years out of date and tampered with by the Heritage Councilor, allowing Mahit only incomplete access to an inexperienced predecessor, in tow with recurring neuropathic pain. Driven by a profound desire "to be whole" (*Memory* 305), she salvages the imago-machine from Yskandr's corpse—nothing left to rot in the City (Empire)—and finds a back-alley surgeon in the outskirts of the City to implant it into her, amidst that spear-garden. Only then does she begin to experience the intended "doubling" (*Desolation* 316) of imago life, "integrated … into a single continuous self" (22), "the space between them hardly a space, thought and action fractionally separated" (59). One is never implanted with two imagos of the same person, and this feels immediately like a threat as Mahit struggles to adjust, worrying that "she/they are going to break apart right along the fault line where the other two are too much alike and she is … not" (*Memory* 342). When it functions, however, she describes it with great, fluvial positivity: the "composite of Yskandr's memories and her own" feeling like a "warm tide" (394).

The Stationers, in other words, are plural, at the same time as they are singular: "[W]ithin herself," Mahit "is already two—but not divisible into one(s)—that caress each other" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 24), becomes three not divisible into one(s)—even where two are instantiations of the same!—a "whole" that "touches itself …, in(de)finitely transformed without closing" (*Speculum* 233). This plurality, this multiplicity, finds concurrent expression in the spatiality of Lsel Station, "a sort of city, if one thought of cities as animate machines, organisms made of interlocking parts and people, too close-packed to be any *other* form of life" (*Desolation* 21). Not agentive in the threatening, surveilling sense of the City (Empire), it becomes apparent that Lsel Station is rather animated through *sociality*: through the interlocking and intermingling of space and people, the mutually constitutive (subject-subject) relationships between architecture and living bodies. As a space station, there are natural constraints—the external walls that separate the interior from the vacuum of space are necessarily unchangeable, which concurrently limits the total area and number of inhabitants, infeasible to expand further outwards into space. As a result, the living quarters assume the homogeneity of small pods, identically curved forms from the outside, Mahit's own adorned with "curved couches inside to match" (123), a (banal) indication of feminine space,

at least for Irigaray (*How Can We Live Together*). Internally, however, the station is clearly defined by change—upon Mahit's return, Yskandr (his elder imago—fifteen years away from Lsel) finds that he "didn't know the geography of the Station any longer"; all "interior, nonstructural walls" were capable of being "moved around, the decks were repurposed, little shops opened and shut" (*Desolation* 22). Even Mahit finds the exact locational geography different, despite only being gone a few months, surprised that she remembers where some things are at all. The Station, we see, models a different space-time: the in(de)finity of *duration*, in flux through constant social animation. The space is amorphous, ever-becoming, malleable to the whims of the population, interstitial kiosks run by teenagers popping up to vend hand-drawn comics to be replaced by something new the next day. Lsel Station thrums with life, vernacular; architecture without architects, space—perhaps—without objects. It is this thrumming, this *life*, that is immediately recognizable to Mahit (and/or Yskandr(s))—"the shape and rhythm of the station, alive and full of people" (23). Lsel Station, then, is utterly heterogeneous, imperially abject even in its architecture; a "dull metal toroid" (*Memory* 449) on the outside, unlike the resplendent steel and glass of the City, the marble and gold, manicured to optical perfection. It is *alive*, not an embalmed corpse: a rhythm and feel of living bodies endlessly reconfiguring the spatiality of the station, in a constant, labial *becoming*, reflexively, with its residents; an always indeterminate future. No single, definitive sun commands Lsel, welcoming instead four sunrises, four sunsets; day and night mingle. This opposes the specular—where the City (Empire) may never be touched, only gazed upon, the tight quarters of the Station mean that its residents "didn't make much eye contact …; they slipped out of each other's way even in the more-crowded parts of the corridors with practiced ease" (*Desolation* 135), an ease, one might suggest, borne of a metaphysical privileging of the lips: tactility and fluidity, rather than visibility and solidity.

This metaphysical shift is, of course, borne of physical technics. Fluidity and multiplicity are engendered by "a tiny irregularity: the unfolded architecture of the imago-machine, a firmness as familiar as the skull bones themselves" (*Memory* 63). In unfolding the space and the architecture that this imago-machine in turn births, it would be an error to ignore this originary firmness, alongside the Stationers' exclusive use of artificial wombs. Regarded as a survival necessity akin to the imagos themselves, Mahit is aghast at discovering the perverse risk some Teixcalaanlitzlim take in choosing pregnancy. While a heterogenous, labial corporeality and spatiality are evident on Lsel,

then, paralleling Teixcalaan's phallocracy, it would be wrong to think either culture *entirely* sexually indifferent. The birth of Lsel's Irigarayan *Sex Which Is Not One* takes place first artificially (in these external wombs), and then technically (through the imago-machine), equally erasing the maternal debt; while Teixcalaan—if only on occasion—has the means with which to revive this primordial, relational dwelling. This is without speaking of the intense politicking of the Lsel Council, surely configurable within a *logos* of domination and insensate rationality; and the vernacular renegotiation of Teixcalaan's undifferentiated onomastics ("Reed," not "Three Seagrass"), surely illustrative of the kind of linguistic transgressions Irigaray herself attempts. It is notable, then, that even in Martine's speculative space-time, the subordination of a clear phallogocentrism to an ostensible labial tendency takes place *through* this originary 'firmness' of the imago; even here, in other words, the phallic appears as default to negotiate. The existence of contrasting sexuate tendencies is—at least for our present—naturally necessary. Without this primal difference, there could be no other difference; Irigaray's philosophy is, in the last analysis, precisely an attempt to communicate *across* difference, by first *establishing* difference. Having done the latter, we may now address Martine's navigation of the former, in approach of a conclusion.

Communicating (Across) Difference: The Alien and the Triple Dialectic

The "basic Teixcalaanli horror"—that which is most abject, the Imperial (urban) *unheimlich*—is any tampering of the mind, that organ most sacred for its rationality, constituting a "fundamental corruption of the self" (*Desolation* 444). It is not solely imperial xenophobia and Lsel Station's political precarity which threaten the relations between the two, relations Yskandr and Mahit are centrally tasked with maintaining, but the very imago-machines that define the Station presenting a *(meta)physical* boundary—a contorted castration anxiety—which critically confounds a relating in difference. The promise of the imago prompts Yskandr's assassination, in turn centrally dividing Reed and Mahit; more than just the gulf of language, or 'civilization,' it is the incomprehensibility of the Other that is *not one*. Reed struggles, in a rationality of fixity and either/or form, to pin down the "real" Mahit—where she begins, and where Yskandr takes over. Their relationship, already defined by suspicion from the outset—whether Mahit could trust Reed as 'liaison' and not surreptitious *han-*

dler; Reed's acquisitive desire to know Mahit's motivations, politically and personally—reaches peak precarity when suspicion courts Mahit's very personhood. Neither are party to the other's rationality; Reed understands neither who (or what) Mahit precisely is, nor, to Mahit's great injury, sees her unavoidable sublation into the Empire (City), her *actual* loss of self not in corporeal collectivity, but in embrace of Teixcalaanli cultural fixity; both willing and unwilling, in adoration and in compulsion, always navigating a metaphysic abject to her body. Mahit is unsure whether Reed is even "capable of comprehending" (222; emphasis removed) the phallogocentric bind, and our glimpse into Reed's consciousness supports this, her wondering only that "Mahit might forgive her, a little, if she kept positioning them both as absolute equals" (259), an implacable phallocratic logic of the Same, pursuing a fiction of similitude and not able (or willing) to recognize positive *difference*.

This gulf appears irreconcilable. How can different forms, different spacetimes, coexist? How can Mahit and Reed remain subjects in their love, remain distinct, without a unilateral domination of voice, tone, meaning? Especially where one has learnt the other not as *subject* at all, but *barbarian*, twice beyond the pale of human, a denigration Mahit feels acutely: "*the bleeding lips of this injury*" (239); the labial ripped asunder by that metaphysical sun-spear. For Irigaray, it is not enough for the Other to establish her own sexual difference, culture, and ethics, and from there to meet the One—they would invariably fuse toward a singular, sublating transcendent Absolute, or talk past one another (Mahit contorted, bleeding, to the Imperial (urban) Same, or else neither her nor Reed understanding each other). Instead, each must respectfully recognize the *limit* that the other represents to their subjectivity; they must produce a third dialectic, a third *space*: "the negative …, a space between them, which belongs neither to the one nor to the other, and which allows them to meet together" (*Key Writings* 3), without appropriation.

Here, we find Martine's speculative fiction, again, offering a manner of literalization, in the alien. With a language physically nauseating to human ears; a spatiality that defies specularity entirely, winking "in and out of the void, there and then not-there, secret and revealed" (*Desolation* 295); and a sole plurality—a hivemind—the alien models a tertiary dialectic. *Opposite* to the phallic, it is the real *unheimlich* of castration, made visceral in its mucosal devouring of the spearpoint ships, a *vagina dentata*, enveloping. It is not, however, the sparse details we glean of the alien itself, its contradictory dialectic and spatiality, that I wish to discuss; it is rather its role as this literal *negative*—that third place of the *void*—which allows it to function as the basis for the dialectic between two:

between the Empire (City) and the Station; between Reed and Mahit. It is in learning to communicate to the unknowable, the utterly abject, in granting it, too, personhood, that sexual difference is both appropriately contextualized (a difference in *kind*, and not in *species*), and which trains them in the recognition of limits *per se*—subjective, linguistic, metaphysical, sexual. On a desert planet, scaldingly hostile to alien and human alike, a third space for their interspecies communication, Mahit and Reed sing an alien tongue together, "a strange intimacy to it that she hadn't expected. They had to breathe together" (277), a breath "permitting us to listen to the other, a breath making possible and sustaining a love that is desired, free, and reciprocal" (Irigaray, *New Culture* 21). A non-appropriative relation between two is, through this third posthuman dialectic, through their breath, inaugurated; Mahit and Reed given the space to come together, figuratively, literally. It is not, however, concluded—being-two is left to the speculative even in Martine's speculative fiction. Their relation mends, but Reed cannot see Mahit as just one, and Mahit, in turn, knows that their love would require the sublation of that difference, knows that she would be consumed in Reed's rapacious gaze, reduced in that logic of oneness; she jests it, in their final moments together, when Reed calls her "enough people already": "'I'm just Mahit Dzmare,' Mahit said, wry. 'Imago and all. Just one person'" (*Desolation* 476). Not the plural of the hivemind, but also one, at the same time as she is three, at the same time as she is two. Difference, Martine foregrounds in this conclusion, retains irreducibility, but not complete irreconcilability; a new, peaceful coexistence, between humanity and the alien, between Lsel and the Empire (City), is speculatively begun, a necessary foundation for a being-two to one day become, even if it ultimately came at the cost of Twenty Cicada losing *his* difference to join the hivemind.

Placing Irigaray's imaginary—labial, sexual, elemental—within the alien space-time of Arkady Martine's *Teixcalaan* duology, to conclude, allows for more than simply unpicking a narrative of difference and its negotiation. In manifesting a recognizable *Sex Which Is Not One* in the labial Stationers, we can glimpse what sexually different architectures, spaces and forms might look like, inspiration for urban design in making space for more than just men; in the contrasting phallic (re)presentation in cloning, we see too the apotheosis of phallocratic logic that we must ward against—a panoptic City (Empire) of sun-spear pointed domination. More than this, the double emplacement of sexual difference may point toward ways in which we ought to practice this philosophy, too, differently. In modelling a *lesbian* relationship that is simultaneously *sexually different*—principally in rationality, though also

corporeally, in the architecture of the imago-machine—the tethers to biological essentialism, and heterosexism (the two leading criticisms of Irigaray's oeuvre) are unraveled. The body is not irrelevant, far from it, but it is also not determinate: phallogocentrism may find its apogee in the grasp of female emperors; the triple dialectic may develop in the alien space between two female-bodied lovers; and *écriture féminine*, one might concurrently wonder, may one day come to fruition at the lips of nonbinary or trans women. Sexual difference, as read through the *Teixcalaan* duology, is flexible enough to move beyond these cissexist, heterosexist trappings, crucial for understanding the lesbian relationship of the no-longer-quite cis Mahit. It is, in the last analysis, evidently flexible enough to move beyond the human too—where the alien models a literal third kind of space, a void, upon which Mahit and Reed learn to communicate (across) difference, we are also offered a glimpse of a Kauraanian kitten, "void-black" (377), and the failed parallel attempt between Nine Hibiscus and Twenty Cicada to dialogue across the black. Perhaps, I might offer in closing, it is animals, too, pets, that could engender a similar recognition of limits, a similar respect for difference; a feline void to fill the fictional place of the alien one. Sexual difference must, in any case, reckon with the family, as much as sex, being extended beyond the biological and the (heterosexual) pair, to the queer, chosen and interspecies too, if it is to remain analytically meaningful—the *Teixcalaan* duology shows one poignant addition those extensions might make, and how this might proceed.

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