Theories and Methodologies

The Khatibi Effect: The Fragment as Horizon of Writing

KHALID LYAMLAHY

> Quelque chose de fragmentaire et d'irréductiblement discontinu est à l'œuvre dans chaque texte. Enchâsser les mots, mais sur quelle ligne de force?
>
> —Abdelkébir Khatibi, *La langue de l'autre*

> Something fragmentary and irreducibly discontinuous is at work in every text. Words are to be embedded, yes, but along what line of force?
>
> —Abdelkébir Khatibi, "The Language of the Other: Testimonial Exercises"

The Fragment: Entries and Exits into the "Writerly" Text

Of all Moroccan postcolonial writers, Abdelkébir Khatibi is probably the one whose work offers, alongside an impressive body of novels, poetry collections, and essays on literature, art, language, and politics in the Maghreb and beyond, one of the most insightful reflections on writing as both a process and a product. In an opening note to *Par-dessus l'épaule* (*Over the Shoulder* [1988]), a hybrid work that melds autobiographical, poetic, and essayistic forms, Khatibi writes that his book, "comme tout ouvrage" ("like any other book"), offers "plusieurs entrées et plusieurs sorties de lecture" ("several reading entries and exits"; 7).[1] Khatibi uses the same phrase five years later to describe *Penser le Maghreb* (*Thinking the Maghreb* [1993]), a sequel to his seminal and oft-quoted work *Maghreb pluriel* (*Plural Maghreb* [1983]). Although the latter's discussion of the Maghreb as a dynamic and pluralistic space has received far more attention in the field of North African studies and beyond,[2] all three works express Khatibi's acute attention to the organization of his writing and to

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the ways in which he can and should be read. More specifically, Khatibi's definition of reading as the operation of getting into and out of a text hints at the wide-ranging scope of his work. "Entering" and "exiting" Khatibi's texts several times and from different points allows the reader to proceed in an open and fluid framework that favors circulation, variation, and flexibility.

This reading experience, which can easily be applied to Khatibi's other works, echoes Roland Barthes's concept of the "texte scriptible" ("writerly text)," an open-ended and reversible text that can be accessed "par plusieurs entrées dont aucune ne peut être à coup sûr déclarée principale" ("by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one"; *S/Z* [2002] 123; *S/Z* [1974] 15–16). For Barthes, the "writerly text" requires "une analyse progressive" ("a gradual analysis"), a "*pas à pas*" ("*step-by-step*") method that corresponds to "la *décomposition* (au sens cinématographique) du travail de lecture: un *ralenti*, si l'on veut" ("the *decomposition* [in the cinematographic sense] of the work of reading: a *slow motion*, so to speak"; 128; 12) that results in "une suite de courts fragments contigus" ("a series of brief, contiguous fragments"; 129; 13). In Barthesian theory, fragmentation is what allows and exemplifies the active reading of a "writerly" text as a multifaceted volume of meanings or blocks of significations. In 1972 Barthes puts this concept into practice through a case study of Georges Bataille. Instead of delivering a compact and monolithic article on his French compatriot, Barthes organizes his thoughts as a series of alphabetically ordered fragments that serve as many "sorties du texte [de Bataille]" ("exits from [Bataille's] text"; "Les sorties" 366) and prefigure his own deeper engagement with fragmentary writing in later works such as *Le plaisir du texte* (*The Pleasure of the Text*), *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (*Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*), and *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (*A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*).

Khatibi's prolific oeuvre, like Barthes's and Bataille's, swiftly moves between disciplines, genres, and forms of writing. One could enter the Khatibian sphere through sociology, literary criticism, poetry, or the novel, and exit through his scattered forays into Islamic art and Maghrebian culture or politics, and vice versa. Reading Khatibi is as much about grappling with the infinitely interconnected and codependent lines of his thought as it is about rethinking the act and experience of reading itself. Each of Khatibi's texts fulfils what I would call, to borrow Réda Bensmaïa's reading of Barthes, the Khatibi effect. Bensmaïa describes the Barthes effect as occurring in "a text in which the arrangement of details, figures, scenes of language, etc. is so organized that *for every reader* there is at least one figure that cleaves him" (*Barthes Effect* 61). Like Barthes's, Khatibi's works hinge on the continuing circulation of subjects, figures, and tropes, as well as the creative combination of writing and reading practices in a way that arouses and intensifies the reader's desire.

This article starts with the idea that the dynamism of Khatibi's thought can be reinterpreted (and better understood) in the light of his writing practice. The way in which Khatibi's texts open and shut, creating gaps and moments of suspension, reflects a writerly strategy of fragments that invites the reader to investigate his writing through incompletion and speculation rather than closure and surety. Moreover, Khatibi's tendency to revisit and revise his works allows him and, by extension, the reader not only to make sense of historical, political, or social transformations but also to rethink his writing through the dynamics of fragmentation and regeneration.

In this article, I define the fragment as a single, self-contained piece of writing (be it an essay, a note, or an aphorism), either published separately, interlinked with other pieces, revised in a new edition, or used as part of a larger work, whether published or not. My multifaceted approach to Khatibi's fragmentary writing is inspired by his agility in moving between forms, genres, and disciplines. It borrows as much from archaeology, where the fragment is usually construed as part of a lost whole, as it does from music, where rearranged fragmentary pieces can produce new meanings. This is the case, for instance, in the work of the Italian composer Luciano Berio, including his famous restoration of Schubert's uncompleted *Tenth Symphony*, significantly

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entitled *Rendering* (1988–89), which, instead of supplementing or merely completing the original work, draws attention to its fragmentary nature by simultaneously interconnecting and emphasizing its gaps.

My approach to the fragment is also informed by Barthes's experience of fragmentary writing as influenced by German Romanticism and the idea that the fragment tends toward the infinite. Barthes, as noted by Lucy O'Meara, "shares Schlegel's hope that the fragments exceed their immediate materiality by pointing toward the varied wholes which they adumbrate" (181). Likewise, Khatibi's fragments, often amended and reissued, point toward the ever-reformulated promise of new bodies of work. I extend my discussion of the fragment to Khatibi's practice of "notation," a short form aimed, in Barthes's experience, at "grabbing a fleeting event or impression quickly, on the wing, as it happens, and registering it in your notebook" (Sheringham 11–12), and revisited through what Khatibi calls the "socio-clip," a word that bears the mark of his sociological gaze and similarly describes a brief sensory experience. While exploring the practice of "notation" and "socio-clip," I question the extent to which fragmentary and discontinuous writing can help us rethink the teleology of Khatibi's writing.

The Reflective Text: Repetition and Mimicry

In using Barthes as a point of reference, I intend to cast light on some underlying connections between his later reflections on the novel and Khatibi's fragmentary writing. In 1965 Barthes was one of the examiners of Khatibi's doctoral thesis in sociology at the Sorbonne, and they later exchanged letters and almost worked together on a semiological project dedicated to the Moroccan garment (Khatibi, *Le scribe* 56). Barthes famously wrote that Khatibi "[lui] enseigne quelque chose de nouveau et ébranle [son] savoir" ("teaches [him] new things and sideswipes [his] knowledge"; "Ce que je dois" 666). But Khatibi, like other writers of his generation, also learned from Barthes, and, more importantly, Khatibi's writing was, to some extent, influenced by Barthes's mutating writing practices.

Khatibi's texts, like Barthes's essays, are reflective in the sense that Bensmaïa describes—namely, they are texts in which "opposites are abolished at the same time that pseudonatural hierarchies and generic frontiers are transgressed" (*Barthes Effect* 50). In such texts, Bensmaïa argues, "it is not only a matter of enabling the reader at any moment to *recognize* himself in one or another of the figures presented to him, but *at the same time*, a matter of repeating, miming, or simulating what has yet to be accomplished: projects, programs" (61–62). A quick look at Khatibi's complex and multifaceted production confirms that repetition, mimicry, and simulation, in addition to the abolition of opposites and boundaries, are at the core of his writing practice. His youthful writings in Marrakesh, where he attended a secondary boarding school in the 1950s, were exercises in mimicry.[3] In his early autobiography, *La mémoire tatouée* (*Tattooed Memory* [1971]), Khatibi describes himself back then as "maniaque dans les imitations" ("a maniac for imitations") of Corneille, Racine, Hugo, and others: "Plusieurs fois, je m'étais hasardé, au gré de mes lectures, à travestir les dieux officiels, à les neutraliser par des exercices d'imitation, d'abord en m'identifiant à eux, et comme ce voisinage me pesait, j'avais viré carrément vers la parodie que je croyais décolonisante" ("A few times I dared, thanks to my readings, to dress up the official gods, to neutralize them by feats of imitation, first identifying with them, and then, since this closeness weighed on me somewhat, swerving sharply toward a parody that I thought decolonized me"; "La mémoire" 56–57; *Tattooed Memory* 74). Khatibi's joyful and subversive imitation of French canonical writers is conducted through a dialectical process of identifying with and differentiating oneself from the other, a simulacrum of decolonization through creative mimicry. In *La mémoire tatouée*, Khatibi has recourse to repetition as a mode of resistance and self-reempowerment. As aptly noted by Lucy Stone McNeece, "the odyssey of Khatibi's narrator is a quest for self-possession and self-knowledge that paradoxically involves a form of self-abandonment, a doubling that demands the surrender of his real self for the sake of a simulacrum which is a

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grotesque parody of the authentic reality he seeks" (16). This tension between possession and abandonment, resistance and surrender, reality and simulacrum, is central to Khatibi's practice of fragmentary writing and resonates in Barthes's lectures at the Collège de France between 1978 and 1980 on the "preparation of the novel." "For what purpose does Khatibi write in fragments?" and "How should one read Khatibi's fragmentary writing?" are two interconnected questions that must be addressed simultaneously.

In the following sections, my immediate goal is to consider the fragment as "a practice of writing, rather than engage in an interpretative reading or commentary" on Khatibi's work (Richman ix). I start by reading Khatibi's tendency to publish some of his works in revised editions as both indicative of his interest in fragmentation and assemblage and a sign of what Bensmaïa called, following Khatibian terminology, an "'other' writing practice" (*Experimental Nations* 117). I then investigate Khatibi's practice of "notation" in *Par-dessus l'épaule* and in relation to Barthes's work in an attempt to cast light on the fragment as both an original form and an open horizon of Khatibi's writing.

Assemblage and Resonance

Strikingly, several of Khatibi's books are structured as a series of separate articles and fragments, often published elsewhere. In 1983 *Maghreb pluriel*, for instance, opens with a revised version of an article previously published in *Du Maghreb*, the special issue of *Les temps modernes* coedited six years earlier by Khatibi, the Tunisian writer Abdelwahab Meddeb, and the Algerian sociologist Noureddine Abdi. Khatibi uses the new version of his article as a preliminary "critique des solidarités métaphysiques" ("critique of metaphysical solidarities"; Cover copy) linking dominant trends of Maghrebian thought, and as an introduction to his pivotal concepts of *double critique* ("double critique") and *pensée-autre* ("other thought"). More importantly, Khatibi is careful to date each article "afin de maintenir la continuité et la discontinuité du livre" ("to maintain the continuity and discontinuity of the book") while also preserving "le style d'écriture de chaque intervention" ("the writing style of each contribution"; *Maghreb pluriel* 41). As a result, Khatibi's oft-quoted book, written over a period of ten years and delving into subjects as diverse as sociology, orientalism, bilingualism, sexuality, and art, reads as an "itinéraire" ("itinerary"), or "cheminement de questions insistantes" ("pathway of persistent questions"; Cover copy) that had, until then, been silenced or marginalized. The structure of *Maghreb pluriel* bears the marks of Khatibi's writing practice as it oscillates between an all-encompassing network of consecutive and interconnected studies and a more partitioned and discontinuous framework made of autonomous fragments.

The same organizing principle is reused in *Penser le Maghreb*, which includes previously published material yet opens with a new article, "Mémorandum sur le Maghreb" ("Memorandum on the Maghreb"), written in 1991, in which Khatibi revises his vision of the future of the Maghreb following the foundation of the Arab Maghreb Union two years earlier. Both *Maghreb pluriel* and *Penser le Maghreb* can be read, in Bensmaïa's Barthesian terminology, as "programmatic" works in the sense that they sketch out Khatibi's "book to come" (*Barthes Effect* xxvii), a reference to Blanchot's *Le livre à venir* (*The Book to Come* [1959]), also organized as a collection of essays previously published, in this case in the literary journal *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. In publishing his articles in updated versions and in opening a space for postcolonial critique and dialogue through revision, annotation, and reorganization, Khatibi, not unlike Barthes in *S/Z*, is actually "giving the 'program' for his works to come" (Bensmaïa, *Barthes Effect* xxvii). This "programmatic" feature, based on the continuing circulation and adaptation of fragments, echoes Khatibi's active mode of thinking and casts further light on the networks that simultaneously define and extend the horizon of his writing.

Khatibi's recurrent tendency to structure some of his books as an assemblage of separate pieces and to issue them in revised and extended versions also serves as a way to adjust his thought to new

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political and cultural contexts. In the same way that the special issue of *Les temps modernes* on the Maghreb was prepared against the backdrop of the emergence and intensification of the Saharan conflict in the mid-1970s and elaborated as a "prise de parole qui s'inscrit en retrait de la violence que traverse le Maghreb" ("an act of speaking out that steps back from the violence gripping the Maghreb"; Abdi et al. 5), Khatibi's *Penser le Maghreb* was an attempt to address the new question of what the creation of the Arab Maghreb Union in 1989 might have changed in the Maghreb as both a region and a concept. As he writes, "Penser le Maghreb, c'est fixer aussi notre attention sur le rapport de la pensée à la contemporanéité, à l'histoire que nous faisons et à celle que nous ne faisons pas" ("to think of the Maghreb is to direct our attention to the relationship between thought and contemporaneity, between thought and the history we are making as well as the one we are not making"; 5). Contemporaneity is equally at the core of Khatibi's writing practice: it is what regenerates his writing through a continuous process of repetition and transformation in dialogue with history, which consequently maintains the Khatibi effect of transgressing boundaries, miming what has yet to be accomplished, and arousing the reader's curiosity. A relevant example of this process is the publication in 1990 of Khatibi's anti-Zionist pamphlet *Vomito blanco: Le sionisme et la conscience malheureuse* (*Vomito blanco: Zionism and Unhappy Consciousness* [1974]) in augmented form as *Paradoxes du sionisme* (*Paradoxes of Zionism*).[4] Sixteen years after its first edition, Khatibi's critique of Zionism, and of the French Left and its inability to think critically and productively about the Palestinian question, is embedded in a new framework with two major additional texts. The first develops a focused and personal reflection on the condition of Moroccan Jews, while the second, previously published in *Revue d'études palestiniennes* in 1981, serves both to reassert Khatibi's critique of the Western Left and to acknowledge the ambiguity of the Hegelian concept of "conscience malheureuse" ("unhappy consciousness") and the lack of theoretical development as two possible shortcomings of his earlier work. It is this hybrid structure, which is slightly less polemical and more reflective, and which Khatibi describes again as "itinéraire" ("itinerary"; *Paradoxes* 11), that serves as a springboard for an "other thought" that could reconcile the recognition of a Palestinian state with that of Judaism as a component of Arab identity.

If Palestine, as demonstrated by Olivia C. Harrison, "functions, in Khatibi's writings, much like the Maghreb, as a 'horizon of thought'" (105), the fragment, as the result of an iterative and open practice, similarly serves as a horizon of writing itself. This is evident not only in Khatibi's abovementioned practice of revising and reissuing his works but also in his continuing quest for a new form of writing. It is no coincidence that *Paradoxes du sionisme* ends with a chapter entitled "Pensées" ("Thoughts") in which Khatibi delivers in fragmentary and aphoristic fashion some further reflections on racism and intolerance (153–57).[5] Khatibi's fragments, partly republished in *Penser le Maghreb*, exemplify a fragmentary mode of writing beyond the central concern of his book. By choosing to end with these fragments, Khatibi performs an "other writing," a formal extension of his "other thought" in the margins of his work.

This concept of "other writing" has been the subject of previous discussions. In his reading of *Amour bilingue* (*Love in Two Languages*), for instance, Bensmaïa describes one of Khatibi's "other" writing practices, which consists in using the power of Arabic calligraphy to "white out" the French language, "not (only) in the simple metaphorical sense of the term—for example, by wresting it from a history in which it had become synonymous with deculturation and/or acculturation—but also in the *most technical* and *formal* sense"—that is, by "'increasing the intervals' of the 'foreign' language" and exhibiting "its own system of blanks and gaps," which result in clearing "an unprecedented space where what is called the mother tongue makes itself heard" (*Experimental Nations* 117–18). Particularly relevant to my argument that the fragment can be construed as the horizon of Khatibi's writing is the idea that Khatibi's "other" writing creates and winds its way through intervals, blanks, and gaps, which allows for a

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fragmentary reconstruction of his writing in the in-between. As suggested by Bensmaïa's analysis, the boundaries of Khatibi's writing, be they linguistic or formal, are systematically blurred, and consequently, the hybrid structures of his books require a radically hybridized mode of reading—namely, a reading that pays as much attention to their margins, intersections, and discontinuities as to their construction as a cohesive body of thought, subject to revision and reuse. In this context, the Khatibi effect is fueled and vitalized by the "internal resonance" (Bensmaïa, *Barthes Effect* 39) of fragments resulting from various strategies of historical, linguistic, and formal displacement.

Notation as "Other Writing"

Khatibi's "other writing," which echoes Barthes's quest for a new form of writing, is nowhere more apparent than in *Par-dessus l'épaule*. The book opens and closes with two series of "Notes de mémoire" ("Memory Notes"), later republished together in *Le livre de l'aimance* ("The Book of Lovence"), and four in-between sections in which Khatibi explores, in distinct forms and genres, the themes of psychoanalysis, the sacred, mourning, and social observation. The book illustrates Khatibi's inclination toward structural blending and boundary transgression as it moves between personal experience (especially the psychoanalysis he underwent between 1982 and 1983 and the loss of his mother, in 1986),[6] poetic creation (around *aimance*), historical investigation (in relation to al-Andalus), and religious studies (around the Prophet's message and the figure of Satan).

At the core of this kaleidoscopic composition, notational writing is a unifying thread that connects Khatibi's texts and fragments, in his words, "à une ligne de force qui peut animer leur mouvement, à une sorte d'insularité imaginaire qui viendrait rythmer un paysage ouvert, se ramifiant en mots, métaphores et effets de surprise" ("to a driving force that may accelerate their movement, to a kind of fictional insularity that would punctuate an open landscape, branching out into words, metaphors, and surprise effects"; *Par-dessus l'épaule* 9). Khatibi's evocation of an extensive landscape of linguistic and visual representations confirms his interest in the regenerative and transformative power of notation. Like Barthes, whose quest for a new writing practice was triggered by his realization that "un moment vient où ce qu'on a fait, écrit (travaux et pratiques passés) apparaît comme un matériau répété, voué à la répétition, à la lassitude de la répétition" ("there comes a time where what you've done, written [past labors and practices] looks like repeated material, doomed to repetition, to the lassitude of repetition"; *La préparation* 27; *Preparation* 4), Khatibi conceives of notation as a way to reinvigorate his writing practice and further expand its creative possibilities. This process of formal expansion is illustrated by Khatibi's claim that the latest notes from his book "sont venues par effet de propagation" ("result from a spreading effect"; *Par-dessus l'épaule* 10): each note, to some extent, is determined by the previous one and anticipates or creates the possibilities for the emergence of the next. The closing note of the book, "J'apprends à regarder les étoiles pour écrire, sur mon carnet de voyage, les notes d'un passant" ("I learn to look at the stars in order to write, in my travel diary, the notes of a passerby"; 184), seems to encompass the previous notes since it describes notational writing as a learning and iterative process confronted with the fleeting nature of the traveler's experience.

Khatibi's interest in "notation" as a form of fragmented yet interlinked writing can fruitfully be compared with Barthes's experience since Barthes, as I mentioned earlier, had an undeniable impact on his writing. This impact is clearly visible in the structure of the chapter dedicated to Barthes in *Figures de l'étranger dans la littérature française* (*Figures of the Stranger in French Literature* [1987]). In fact, Khatibi's reading of Barthes's *L'empire des signes* (*Empire of Signs*) starts as an essay and ends as a series of fragments in a revealing shift that seems to echo, if not to imitate, Barthes's notational model. The opening lines of the chapter describe the way in which Barthes wandered across disciplines and theories before turning to fragmentary writing as part of what Khatibi calls "l'art du détour . . . , de la délicatesse" ("the art of

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detour . . . , of delicacy"; *Figures* 59–60). Khatibi's essay on Barthes is itself the result of a "detour" in the sense that it revisits Barthes's experience through a combination of formal, thematic, and theoretical conversations with his text. Khatibi writes, for instance, echoing Barthes, that the fragment cannot be developed for it offers "rien que des marques, des éclairs, des blessures, mais ce rien fait vibrer le tout" ("nothing but marks, lightning, wounds, but this nothing makes it all vibrate"; 69). This vibration seems to generate, by extension, Khatibi's fragmentary writing in dialogue with and under the influence of Barthes. While Bensmaïa notes that "the dominant figure that governs the formation of fragments" in Barthes's work is "indisputably that of *complication* (the diagonal encounter of several languages, the montage of different texts, the telescopings of quotations from various sources, etc.)" (*Barthes Effect* 43), Khatibi's fragments simultaneously reproduce and extend this process while commenting on Barthes's text. Detour, vibration, and complication are all modes of fragmentary production that describe the underlying dialogue between Barthes and Khatibi.

This dialogue may well have a much broader scope. Andy Stafford aptly notes that the "elliptical, notational style" of Khatibi's early poems published in the Moroccan journal *Souffles* (*Breaths*) in 1966 is "not dissimilar to the Barthes of *Incidents* in Moroccan street scenes in 1969" (50). More than a shared stylistic technique, notation exemplifies the two-way circulation of signs, ideas, and practices between Barthes and Khatibi. In *Figures*, Khatibi pulls his essay toward the fragment in an attempt to appropriate and try his hand at Barthes's poetics. More importantly, he considers that the only way to make sense of Barthes's experience with the Japanese "other" is to adopt "un langage plus sensible à la fissure du signe, à la forme littéraire brève, fragmentaire" ("a language more attuned to the fissure of the sign, to the brief and fragmentary literary form"; *Figures* 79). Just as Barthes draws on the haiku to inform his practice of fragmentary writing in *L'empire des signes* and in his later lectures on the novel, Khatibi draws on the Barthesian fragment in *Figures* to explore the possibilities of a new form of writing. Khatibi's fragments are as much concerned with the very experience of reading and writing about Barthes as they are with Barthes's writing about Japan. For what other purpose is Khatibi then interested in notation and fragmentary writing?

Hybridity and Indeterminacy

In *Par-dessus l'épaule*, it first appears that Khatibi finds in the fragment both an echo and a continuation of his dynamic mode of thinking. In one of the first fragments, he writes, "Je compose ces notes dans un microclimat affectif pour accompagner l'arrivée d'une nouvelle saison. Chaque année a sa floraison de mythes et de métaphores" ("I compose these notes in an emotional microclimate to accompany the arrival of a new season. Each year has its flowering myths and metaphors"; 21–22). For Khatibi, notation is an exercise simultaneously grounded in the present and turned toward the future, which unmistakably echoes Barthes's description of notational temporality as "un *temps lisse*: sans butée, sans échéance" ("a *smooth time*, a time with no endpoint, with no expiration date"), similar to what he calls "la dérive" ("drifting"; *La préparation* 286; *Preparation* 216). This "smooth time," which allows flexibility and mobility, is particularly relevant to the ethics of *aimance*, since "l'Aimance ne se donne aux partenaires que par bribes, entre la force de la vie et le geste oblique du déclin" ("Lovence is offered to partners only in bits and pieces, between the power of life and the oblique gesture of decline"; *Figures* 167). If *aimance* is a new form of amatory-social interaction based on nuance, fluidity, and flexibility, notation is an attempt to inscribe these values in the very body of the text. For Khatibi, writing in fragments is an "arrangement rituel" ("ritual arrangement"; 30) or a "procession rituelle" ("ritual procession"; 34) that fits closely with "l'instabilité du désir" ("the instability of desire"; 166). Without sacrificing order and harmony, the fragment brilliantly reflects fragility as one facet of human relationships.

Khatibi is also interested in notation as a writing practice that makes room for silence and

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incorporates unfilled gaps and hiatuses. For him, notation is a mode of writing in the interstice, of looking "over the shoulder" to capture a fleeting moment or impression. It is located, in Barthes's words, "à l'intersection *problématique* d'un fleuve de langage, langage ininterrompu: la *vie*—qui est texte à la fois enchaîné, filé, successif, et texte superposé . . . palimpseste—, et d'un geste sacré: *marquer*)" ("at the *problematic* intersection of a river of language, of uninterrupted language—*life*, both a continuous, ongoing, sequenced text and a layered text . . . a palimpsest—and a sacred gesture: to *mark*"; *La préparation* 46; *Preparation* 18). This productive encounter between the palimpsestic textuality of life and the practice of notation is explored by Khatibi in a section from *Par-dessus l'épaule* entitled "Socio-clips," a term he defines as "une note aussi rapide qu'un regard indiscret sur autrui" ("a note as quick as a prying eye upon others"; *Par-dessus l'épaule* 156). Khatibi's "socio-clips" render a series of separate and stolen moments (snatches of conversations heard in the metro, description of a butcher's gestures, observation of a bourgeois unfolding a newspaper, etc.) but also some scattered reflections on racism, exile, hospitality, offering, and *aimance*. Between meditative practice and social observation, a socio-clip is an attempt to contain the world in a brief, concise, and descriptive statement that echoes Barthes's definition of the haiku as a "forme exemplaire de la Notation du Présent" ("exemplary form of the Notation of the Present") and "un élément ténu de la vie 'réelle,' présente, concomitante" ("a tiny element of 'real,' present, concomitant life"; *La préparation* 53; *Preparation* 23). Here again, Khatibi agrees with Barthes that "le haïku est proche d'une rêverie-clip, du clin d'œil" ("haiku is close to a reverie-clip, a wink"), as if "quelques mots suffiraient pour mettre de l'ordre dans le monde, en saisir au vol l'harmonie mobile" ("a few words would suffice to put the world in order, to capture its mobile harmony on the fly"; "Ombres japonaises" 209). The haiku epitomizes Barthes's and Khatibi's dialogue around notation as a mode of rewriting the present and reinventing the form of writing itself.

Khatibi's practice of the socio-clip in particular, and of fragmentary writing in general, is all the more indebted to Barthes's work for envisioning a potential transition from notation to the novel. Barthes's lectures revolve around the idea that "à l'horizon de la division, c'est-à-dire de la prolifération dense de la Notation, il y a le Roman" ("on the horizon of division, that is, of the dense proliferation of Notations, lies the Novel"; *La préparation* 140; *Preparation* 93). It is striking that Barthes's "proliferation of Notations" echoes Khatibi's "spreading effect" mentioned earlier and certainly not a coincidence that Khatibi, like Barthes, used notation as an intermediary form on the path toward the novel. A particularly revealing example is Khatibi's novel *Un été à Stockholm* (*A Summer in Stockholm*), which emerged from a series of notes and snapshots taken during a trip to the Swedish capital. When describing this process, Khatibi writes, "[C]ette écriture sur le vif, la notation sténographique et quelques fragments de poèmes en prose, m'obligeait à surimposer mes souvenirs, ceux qui sont du passé et ceux qui sont en devenir" ("[T]his on-the-spot writing, between stenographic notation and fragmentary prose poems, obliged me to superimpose my memories, those from the past and those in the making"; *La langue* 49; "Language" 1009). It then becomes clear that notation itself is embedded in a hybrid structure in which boundaries between genres, spaces, and temporalities are constantly transgressed. The fragment is a malleable, if indeterminate, form that reinforces the dynamics of Khatibi's "reflective" texts.

Just as Barthes "exploits his perception of the 'uncertainty' of the essay form in order to propose a digressive and pan-generic organisation of his material" during his lectures at the Collège de France (O'Meara 200), Khatibi transforms his perception of the indeterminacy of the fragment into an opportunity to explore an alternative way of writing between and beyond literary genres. In a note from the "Socio-clips" section of *Par-dessus l'épaule*, he wonders, "De cette scène, faire un roman? une pièce de théâtre? un film? un dessin

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éclaté?" ("What can I make out of this scene? A novel? A play? A movie? A shattered drawing?"; 153). This indeterminacy not only keeps Khatibi's quest for a "book to come" alive but also suggests that he might have surpassed Barthes in rethinking notation as a radically more flexible, hybrid, and undecided form that operates beyond the novel.

Dreaming in Fragments

At the end of his lectures, Barthes concedes that the haiku, and by extension notation, might be insufficient to write a novel, adding that "le Roman . . . , dans sa grande et longue coulée, ne peut soutenir la 'vérité' (du moment): ce n'est pas sa fonction. Je me le représente comme un tissu (= Texte), une vaste et longue toile peinte d'illusions, de leurres, de choses inventées, de 'faux' si l'on veut" ("the Novel . . . , in its grand and extended continuity, can't sustain the 'truth' (of the moment): that's not its function. I see it as an interweaving (= Text), a vast, extended canvas painted with illusions, fallacies, made-up things, the 'false' if we want to call it like that"; *La préparation* 161; *Preparation* 108). Throughout his career, Khatibi, like Barthes, consistently searched for a form of writing that would simultaneously "sustain the 'truth' (of the moment)" and embody the always creative and regenerative lines of his thought. While Barthes concludes that the novel requires the interweaving of real and illusory fragments, Khatibi develops his work by superimposing various layers, genres, and forms of writing. In this hybrid structure, Khatibian fragments function as many shards of an underlying whole constantly reimagined and reconstructed throughout his works.

Notation, for Khatibi, was one way among others to renew his writing practice. He certainly appreciated the undeveloped and self-sufficient form of the fragment since it served to further blur the boundaries of his writing and to extend, as much as possible, the horizon of his texts and that of his reader. In a note from *Par-dessus l'épaule*, Khatibi writes, "Je vois la composition de ces notes, mais je ne vois pas assez leur effet sur le lecteur et la lectrice. Cette indétermination convient à mon regard sur le monde et sur moi-même" ("I can see through the composition of these notes, but I can't clearly see their impact on the reader. This indeterminacy is suited to my vision of the world and of myself"; 40). The indeterminacy and open-endedness of fragmentary writing create the conditions for a new mode of resistance and self-reempowerment, central to Khatibi's ability to move between disciplines and genres while remaining in formal and distant conversation with other writers, including Barthes. Ultimately, then, the fragment is a unifying factor that underlies Khatibi's oeuvre and points toward his unfinished quest for the "book to come." What would this book be like? And what would it tell us about Khatibi's fragmentary writing?

The answer may be hidden in Khatibi's introduction to *Par-dessus l'épaule*, as he writes, "J'ai toujours rêvé, sans en connaître bien le secret, d'écrire un texte en pointillé, je veux dire ce mouvement de la main qui écrit comme s'il rencontrait, à la croisée des chemins, le geste du peintre et la partition du musicien, devant un paysage qui s'approche d'une pensée, d'une grande pensée d'amour" ("I have always dreamed of writing a text in dots without knowing its secret. I mean this hand movement that writes as if crossing paths with the painter's stroke and the musician's score, facing a landscape that resembles a thought, a great loving thought"; 9). For Khatibi, fragmentary writing had some secret rules that remained out of reach but always enmeshed in the ethics of *aimance* and the rules of hybridization, repetition, and circulation. The "text in dots," which refers to Khatibi's definition of the tattoo in *La blessure du nom propre* (*The Wound of the Proper Name* [1974]),[7] is similarly composed of circulating signs and hidden levels of meaning. Fragmentary writing is, to borrow Debra Kelly's words about the tattoo, "a form of writing that must be deciphered, a writing that does not give itself up to a simple reading" (242), but rather requires an active and hybridized reading in the in-between. Just as *Par-dessus l'épaule* is the aggregation of pieces and fragments haunted by the practice of notation and the question of literary form, the dreamed-of "text in dots" or the literary tattoo, which Khatibi never wrote, may well be the

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heterogeneous, fragmentary, and discontinuous body of his complete works.

Khatibi was perhaps aware that his dream of a "text in dots," like Barthes's pursuit of the novel, was to remain unfulfilled. This, however, did not prevent him from dreaming his "book to come" in fragments scattered throughout his works. The Khatibi effect has precisely to do with the pleasure of wandering between these fragments and reading each of them not only as a focused reflection of discontinuity and iteration as modes of knowledge production and dissemination but also as an infinitely open and productive horizon of possibilities.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

2. Mignolo, for instance, reads Khatibi's dynamic work as representative of what he calls "border thinking."

3. On Khatibi's background and experience in Morocco, see Hiddleston and Lyamlahy, "Abdelkébir Khatibi."

4. On Khatibi's *Vomito blanco*, see Harrison 101–28.

5. Khatibi was an avid reader of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Montaigne, Michaux, and Valéry, whose works included many instances of aphoristic writing. In the North African context, yasser elhariry suggests that "the sage paucity of the aphoristic" in Khatibi's long poem *Le lutteur de classe à la manière taoïste* (*Class Warrior–Taoist Style*) is "in deep resonance with Jabès."

6. On Khatibi's writing about mourning, see Lyamlahy.

7. See Reeck.

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