

## LITTLE-KNOWN DOCUMENTS

## Tattoos: Writing in Dots

ABDELKÉBIR KHATIBI

INTRODUCTION AND TRANSLATION  
BY MATT REECK

MATT REECK is a 2022 Guggenheim Fellow and a 2022 ACLS Fellow in translation. His translation of Zahia Rahmani's *"Muslim": A Novel* won the 2020 Albertine Prize, and his forthcoming translation of Abdelkébir Khatibi's *The Wound of the Proper Name* is the recipient of the 2020–21 Northwestern University Global Humanities Translation Prize. He is an adjunct assistant professor of French at St. John's University.

## Introduction

Appearing in English translation for the first time, "Tatouage: Écriture en points" ("Tattoos: Writing in Dots") is excerpted from the Moroccan French-language literary writer, sociologist, and semi-otician Abdelkébir Khatibi's book of experimental intersemiotics, *La blessure du nom propre* (*The Wound of the Proper Name* [1974]). *La blessure du nom propre* showcases an astonishingly eclectic and penetrating semiotic reading of five subjects of Moroccan, North African, and Arab or Arabic popular culture: proverbs, tattoos, calligraphy, a medieval sex manual, and oral storytelling. Nasrin Qader has called *La blessure du nom propre* a "significant book both methodologically and thematically not just for Khatibi studies but for studies at the intersection of semiotics, anthropology, and literary and cultural studies in general."

"Tattoos: Writing in Dots" is an example of experimental intersemiotics that suggests new ways of achieving the intersectionality important to many scholars today. In the words of Qader, Khatibi's goals as an intellectual are to "constantly, incessantly safeguard that fragility, flexibility and mobility necessary for thought." The intersemiotic directly addresses these goals. Through this modality of thought, Khatibi identifies intersigns and documents how they operate as countersystematic agents of cultural meaning. As David Fieni has convincingly argued, Khatibi's intersign is not codified through the signifier and signified (3). Moreover, the "intersemiotic" of the intersign is not defined through the Jakobsonian paradigm of the translation of the verbal to the nonverbal, or word to image (Jakobson 127). Rather, Khatibi's version of the intersemiotic sign points to that which exists between or beyond sign systems already formalized through rational parameters.

For Khatibi, the intersemiotic is a strategy and modality for writing against bounded discourses and rhetorical norms; it takes place both in his more theoretical writing and in the hybrid, poly-, or antigeneric forms of his creative writing. In this book, Khatibi uses the word *combinatoire* ("combinatorium") to point to the figurative space of a sign

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295

system where signification's intersection and imbrication take place. Yet the intersemiotic is para- or perisystematic, and so its combinatorium is a separate space outside regimented norms where new dynamics of relationality can ensue. We could think of intersigns as dark matter. Visible to astronomers only through indirect measures, dark matter nevertheless fills the majority of the universe: an integument beyond our ability to rationally cognize, if not beyond our ability to perceive. In one sense, then, the intersign marks the most abundant form of cultural signs that nevertheless escape being explained through dominant, rational, and, in this context, inherently European paradigms.

Yet Khatibi uses another metaphor, that of a crystal, to help elucidate the intersemiotic intersign (*Blessure* 11). Tattoos, as a Khatibian intersign, are refracted, dispersive signs (like beams of light passed through a crystal); they are "migratory," unmoored from any symbolic origin we can identify (64). Thus, tattoos are a representative subaltern sign in Khatibi's oeuvre, partially obscured beneath the authority of dominant discourses and epistemological forms but not invisible or erased. Khatibi's first significant literary work, *La mémoire tatouée* (*Tattooed Memory*, translated by Peter Thompson [2017]), takes the tattoo as a titular trope indicative of a type of prelinguistic memory that exceeds the limits of logocentric discourse. In "Tattoos: Writing in Dots," Khatibi clearly spells out the sociopolitical, religious, and cultural forces that attempt to suppress the tattoo as intersemiotic intersign. He cites European philosophy's mistrust of the nonlogocentric written mark; the tattoo, then, poses a threat to the Western metaphysical tradition's phonocentric bias that validates the written mark only as a form of represented speech. He also points out how the religions of the book wish to suppress tattoos for the way that they undercut religion's claims to textual precedence, cultural anteriority, and identitarian authenticity.

"Tattoos: Writing in Dots" represents the thematic and methodological characteristics of Khatibi's theoretical and creative writing, the one type of writing never fully separate from the other. Through revalorizing tattoos, Khatibi exemplifies

his "double critique" ("Abdelkébir Khatibi"). He venerates a form of popular culture whose study was neglected by colonial anthropology and then suppressed by the urban, elitist, and theocratic forms of national culture promulgated by Morocco's postcolonial ruling cadre. Then, through the methodological imperatives of his experimental intersemiotics—whose implicit goal is nothing less than reformulating knowledge—Khatibi institutes a bricolage citational frame that further disrupts ideological practices. Khatibi quotes from canonical French theorists and semioticians. He also quotes from canonical French literary authors, disregarding the separation of literary and scholarly citational practices and so disrupting the purported difference between subjective and objective authority. Despite his general distrust of French colonial anthropology's imperialist goals, he also quotes from several French colonial sources. To be sure, his citational index extends well beyond the European. He cites from the holy books of the religions of the Levant, as well as from, most importantly, the reservoir of images, sayings, books, and knowledge derived from Moroccan, North African, and Arab or Arabic popular cultures. This citational style bears witness to his considerable learning and his eclectic intellectual bearing, and it also represents a transgression of the institutional limits of knowledge that freeze the circulation of ideas into fetishized forms.

The intersemiotic sign in Khatibi is an elusive (allusive) third term, and Khatibian intersemiotics is a modality of speculative, countersystematic, and intensely productive and provocative thought. "Tattoos: Writing in Dots" revalorizes the tattoo as a significant form of indigenous, sub-elite, inter- and intracultural intersigns that connect Morocco to other countries in the Arab or Arabic cultural sphere. Full of conceptual richness, Khatibi's notion of the intersemiotic as dispersive, countersystematic refraction could be applied outside his own oeuvre to better understand contemporary issues of importance ranging from the analysis of the iterative productivity of translation to the production of new concept maps of world forming that better reflect today's multidirectional circulation of cultures and

languages beyond the binaries of colonialism/postcolonialism.

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## Tattoos: Writing in Dots

### A Dot, a Nib

What attracts our attention is the migration of one sign (or symbol) to another, however minute (a dot for example). And, little by little, the widening displacement of graphemes—this extraordinary repertory of objects extending, for example, from a cave painting to calligraphy, or to a rug, a tattoo, a basket or an embroidered scarf. Yet, this tremor of signs is nothing other than the productive motif (itself itinerant) of our interrogation: the displacement of signs in a wandering series whose graphic representation sometimes vibrates in an efflorescence of meaning, and sometimes freezes this migration in place, effectively erasing the gyratory space that is thereby reduced to a dot, a nib.

Where should we start? When Albrecht Dürer was asked to re-create a scene from the Book of Revelations, he drew an angel with spread wings pointing a stylus at the forehead of a genuflecting priest. Perhaps we will never be able to know if the angel's stylus was a *qalam* or a nib used for tattooing, but never mind! An archaeology of knowledge will allow me to question and lay claim to this suspended gesture: history will teach me if such tattooing was possible. The enigma will be erased by historical discourse: in one case (tattooing), as in the other (writing on the forehead of the priest), the nib will have a place. Each will ask me to imagine the result of a similar substitution. In doing so, the entire destiny of the gesture will be changed for the angel-tattoo artist and the angel-engraver. Reflections of this gyratory movement in the mirror

will separate and then fall into the historical record of meaning. But it is a hasty substitution. For what will history tell me, if only how history will project into me through a naive fraud (here, it is mnemonics that keeps meaning alive) the fantastical terrain of a mad identity?

Of course, I will have to articulate the life of the intersemiotic trace. For example, I will search in cave paintings for the analogous form that still exists in paintings or in tattoos or in tapestries. Or, I will search with great care for an archaic dance step in a rug's motif. Confining myself within this dazzling, circular identity, I will be able to breathe. To write the intimate correspondence of the dispersal of signs, I will have to compose and recompose my body according to a technique of relaxation and wisdom, which will lead me finally to the belief that death *writes* for me, in my place, the increasingly stark outline of my solitude: a dot, a nib. And nothing will prevent me from thinking that masked death (of which archaeology is a slightly crazy rebus) prepared a celebration for my own pleasure, or rather the image of a celebration. To efface my disorder in a fable-like sign, a glance cast at an animal engraving will suffice.

### 1. The Double Prohibition

This pleasure, as desirable as it is, must declare its theoretic basis. Let us agree for the moment that writing (in its broadest sense) includes all semiotic systems, both visual and spatial, and that the classic

distinction between pictograph and logograph proves to be largely illusory. Jacques Derrida proved how, since the Greeks, Western knowledge is tied to a question of writing. The fundamental categories (intelligible/sensible, presence/absence, etc.) go back to an ideological system by which the West tied its history (its episteme) to a logographic adventure, effectively repressing all graphic writing that cannot be contained within the horizon of its metaphysics. Speech is primary, and language is the “expression” of speech (having content that transcends speech), and the written mark simply camouflages this movement: the written mark is the double disguise of a “content” that is forever elsewhere. Derrida denounces the logocentric vagaries still present in the fields of linguistics and semiotics—sciences we now consider to be the most rigorous of the “social sciences.” Reconsidering the sign and the concept of the sign along these lines leads to the breakdown of our belief in metaphysics. Derrida’s inscribed sign (the trace) is a sign without origin, a sign lodged inside the most violent difference.<sup>1</sup> This is where the tattooed person and tattooed writing arise. Let us say that this deconstruction of Western knowledge responds to our desire: the subordination of our culture to the West calls for a similar decentering. The Derridean gesture permits the reconsideration of the status of less logocentric cultures:<sup>2</sup> Chinese culture or Arab culture has already thought out the concept of the sign in other terms. The best-known example (though still poorly understood) is that of calligraphy, which, in a manner of speaking, integrates the two faces of the sign, the signifier and the signified, within its combustive textual production. In calligraphy’s movement, the inscribed trace creates knowledge in the largest form of materiality: a dot, a nib, a sign not exactly without origin, but rather a sign whose very movement is the gyratory space of our interrogation, of our erasure.

It will be necessary to provisionally allow this reversal of values tying speech to the written mark in order to accept, as we do, that tattooing is “writing in dots” (the phrase used sometimes by Arabs for it); in other words, that it falls under the rules of a form of knowledge, a *savoir-faire*, a desire, the circulation of signs

sometimes inscribed on the body and sometimes migrating into other spaces: signs whose original symbol has often been lost to us, but whose still-living inscription defies our theories of the sign.

The orthodox linguist will tell us that tattooing is indeed a semiotic system, but very secondary, very marginal; moreover, it is not even a language because it does not abide by the economy of double articulation. The linguist will then tell us, “Before approaching your object (tattoos), please begin by constituting a new discipline, *graphematics*, which will allow you to analyze the combinatorium specific to each semiotic system. We will then see whether it will be possible—and I doubt it will—to construct a general comparative theory. Intersemiotics does not exist.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet this method does not articulate the metaphysical presuppositions that define it. Operating on the assumption that science accumulates facts in the course of refining its methods, science delegitimizes the very question of the graphic sign, that is to say in no uncertain terms, the creative life of the sign. Yet, we know, since Lacan, that the “tip of desire” does not follow the same path: the inscribed sign is not a simple veil, a disguise; it has a strategic position in the discourse of the unconscious.

This response of orthodox linguists—which is reductive, repressive, and obsessed with accumulating knowledge (but what exactly is being accumulated?)—is anathema to the approach that opposes it, which considers the written mark not to be the pretext of transcendental knowledge but the domain of an astonishing variety of writing systems whose radically divergent and unique trajectories must be acknowledged.

There is another reason why we are interested in tattoos: their ban by the principal monotheistic religions, as though divine writing wanted to hide behind its palimpsest all other forms of writing, especially the written mark on the body. While biblical texts are fundamentally ambiguous (the symbol and the parable dominate their discourse), we can now suggest that religion, being linked to logography, pushed tattooing into the field of the profane and impure. It is for this reason alone that it is

necessary to return to the repressed forms of *arche*-writing that abide in us.

We wonder if the sign of Cain in Genesis and the mark of God in the Book of Revelations were tattooed signs.<sup>4</sup> In Genesis, it is said, “But the Lord said to them, ‘Anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.’ Then the Lord put a mark on Cain.”<sup>b</sup> It seems the mark was placed on his forehead. According to James George Frazer, the mark of divine reprobation would have rendered the murder of Abel in some way unintelligible.<sup>5</sup> Instead of being a signal, a hint, it would have been a symbol stronger than death. Whatever history’s explanation, the bodily mark inscribed between brothers, between brothers and their father (God), is the place where the logographic inscription and the divine myth of the original trace are linked. God lays claim to the mark while giving it an origin.<sup>6</sup> And any origin myth is metaphysically like Borgesian rhetoric, which after having been proliferated in cyclical time while searching for the word, the one word that could bring back the world, becomes immobilized, stuck in the very gesture that set it in motion and that brought it into being.

Other biblical passages mention a branding mark, a sign of humiliation and servitude; the Western world would later implement this system for the registration of prisoners and the deported. In Exodus, Moses says, “This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that this law of the Lord is to be on your lips.”<sup>d</sup> And then, this, in the Book of Revelations:

Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: from the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed. And 12,000 from the eleven other tribes [of Israel].<sup>e</sup>

And this verse: “On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings, and lords of

lords.”<sup>f</sup> And this: “You shall not make for yourself an image of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.”<sup>g</sup>

In the Bible, this type of mark is used to illustrate the sign of faith, which is to say, to distinguish the faithful from others. It is a system of classification separating believers and others, free men and slaves, women and prostitutes; in short, we find again the binary division of purity and impurity. Later, cultures influenced by Judeo-Christianity will reject tattooing, placing it in the domain of the wild, the despicable, and the mentally ill. The observations of the criminologist Lombroso are quite comical:

Nothing is more natural than to see a usage so widespread among savages and prehistoric peoples reappear in classes that, as the deep-sea bottoms retain the same temperature, have preserved the customs and superstitions, even the hymns, of the primitive peoples, and who have, like them, violent passions, a blunted sensibility, a puerile vanity, long-standing habits of inaction, and very often nudity.<sup>h</sup>

Obviously, we no longer make such preposterous claims, and on the Côte d’Azur after World War II we could admire women in bathing suits whose bodies were decorated with temporary tattoos that reproduced in lavish detail the paintings of the most famous modern painters. These women had to be aware of the upset caused by this written garment that is tattoos. But this fad couldn’t last, because it was against the economic principles of fashion. Returning to tattoos would have provoked a fearsome competition with clothing.

What does this have to do with Islam? The Qur’an is silent on the subject of tattoos, but one hadith clearly says, “Damned be the tattooer and the tattooed.” Tattooing becomes as serious as usury. When writing in dots replaces sacred writing, the sacred hierarchy of signs risks being destroyed—a logographic hierarchy, established by a divine decision and a transcendental discourse. In the circulation of systems and discourses, the profane reading of the body clearly must obey a doxological code, the only one capable of veiling the ecstatic

letter and the chaotic body. But Islamic mysticism (in its most provocative form) will play with the two codes, will neutralize them through a subversion so strong that we no longer know which code is obscured in all of this: we are referring to that *bis-mallah*<sup>7</sup> tattooed on the pubic areas of the courtesans of Benghazi.

We will also recall these lines of the pre-Islamic poet: “I remember Fatima’s face, / Which, when tattooed, / And veiled, became so sweet.” Nevertheless, the religious condemnation of representational art remains ambivalent: we can ask ourselves if this prohibition (against pre-Islamic idolatry) did not paradoxically reinforce the forms of writing that religion wanted to suppress; we will see later how calligraphy admirably transgressed this prohibition while staying faithful to the divine word. That is why the debate over figuration is a secondary concern here: it is the West that affords it an undue amount of attention.<sup>8</sup> Not only was representation (fundamentally “abstract”) capable of coexisting with the figurative arts (in particular, with miniatures, which are contemporaneous in the Arab world with shadow puppet theater), but representation has become, despite the more-or-less explicit prohibition, a generalized repertory of signs.

This double prohibition—religious and theoretic—justifies our interest in tattoos and speaks to another aspect of our current history: the elites of countries still under Western domination defend the idea of a national culture, that is to say, a positivism that is nothing other than the ideological mark of the petite bourgeoisie. In the name of national culture, we censure, we repress the values of popular culture, which are less logographic, more sensitive to a historical continuity of bodies. It is through the criticism of this ideology that knowledge can be built in theory and can play out in an art of living.

## 2. Stigma, *Wachma*, Tattoos, Writing

*Stigma* (Greek noun; *stigmatos*, genitive): the mark of a hot iron or a pointed instrument; tattooing in keeping with religious practices, and other tattooing.<sup>1</sup>

*Stizo* (verb): to prick, to mark with a hot iron or a pointed instrument, to brand a horse, to punctuate.

Three types of inscriptions are mentioned here: social markings of class (to identify an animal, a person, a slave); tattoos; and, the third, punctuation, which bears witness to the impossibility of removing the pictographic system (to punctuate) from a linguistic space. It is necessary to reconsider how punctuation functions in discourse. The word *stigmaté* (seldom used in French) and the archaic word *matacher* disappear in favor of *trace*, *mark*, *inscription*, and, of course, *writing*. Do not forget the tip of desire in Lacanian rhetoric. The frequency of the word “nib” [*pointe*] is astonishing in Michel Foucault.

*Wachma* (verb, *wachama*). The encyclopedic dictionary *Lisān al-‘Arabī*<sup>2</sup> gives the following remarks: *wachma* indicates the tattoo that a woman makes on her arms (and which is called the “lines of the gazelle”) with a needle coated with burnt fat. A temporary tattoo can also be done with henna.

We say, “*Wachamt al-ard’* . . .” The earth “tattoos itself” when a bit of grass grows. Likewise, the sky, when lightning flashes. Or, by analogy, a girl, when her breasts begin to grow. When I say that there is *wachm* between you and me, this means that there is a conflict between us: the trace of evil forces desire to move like a palimpsest. *Wachama* is close to the root of *wasama* (to brand), which leads to the supposition that there is a close connection between human tattooing and the propitiatory sacrifice of a newly born animal from the herd during the pilgrimage to Mecca (the ritual marking of animals).<sup>9</sup>

This metaphoric chain generalizes writing to an anthropomorphic level, while occluding meaning in a circular symbol; this translates effectively the tension that exists in the heart of Islam between pre-Islamic writing and the rhapsodic writing-cum-fiat of the Qur’an, conceived in the terms of an irreversible surpassing of all later forms of writing. The word “*wachma*” continues to be used in Arabic literature.<sup>10</sup>

The Polynesian word *tattoo* comes from *tatou* or *tatahou* (*ta*: to draw). James Cook wrote it down for the first time as *tattow* (which has become in English the verb *tattoo*), a word infrequently used in French outside of its literal meaning. The author of these pages has not forgotten that the circulation

of this word in one of his texts is troubling for those who only know of the tattoos of humiliation on the bodies of prisoners or the deported.

We will multiply the connotative play in lexical ambiguity of/among these three words *stigma*, *wachma*, and *tatahou*—their simple musicality, the sparkling echo of their drama. Here, to write means to suspend cultural narcissism; to avoid learned transposition in order to achieve a productive disinterestedness. Thus, to locate the meaning of all scriptural forms, and to lose track of meaning, without theoretical or methodological ruse (of school), in the evanescent trace of several root words.

### 3. The Geometric Game

The limitations of writing—one major form of our imagination—are by now clear: the audiovisual seems to inaugurate the technico-symbolic decline of the hand. Perhaps it will change the cycle linked to the relation between the spoken and the written. It seems to us that the semiotic is born in the loss of such an economy of the body.

Mallarmé already analyzed this fissure as it pertains to the basic community of forms noted by A. Leroi-Gourhan:<sup>11</sup> technique, language, and figuration. Mallarmé's variations on the pure sign engender a chaotic retranslation, a space forever written, and whose center and figures, while dispersing in a game of chance, are defined by an inscription liberated from literary representation.

The following movement provides one fugitive glimpse into this intersemiotic poetics:

... *the dancer is not a woman dancing*, for these juxtaposed reasons: that *she is not a woman*, but a metaphor summing up one of the elementary aspects of our form: knife, goblet, flower, etc., and that *she is not dancing*, but suggesting, through the miracle of bends and leaps, a kind of corporal writing, what it would take pages of prose, dialogue, and description to express, if it were transcribed: a poem independent of any scribal apparatus.<sup>12k</sup>

The “dancing person” is a theoretical limit of language, or, more precisely, the dancing person lives in the suspension between the spoken word and

the written word: the dancing person writes the spoken word and destroys it; the dancing person pulls from space a rigorous and polyphonic geometry: a whirlwind of codes, a mirage of written marks, an erasure of the trace by which the origin announces and consumes itself.

It is not about returning to a “natural” origin and to the illusion of nature's open book, like writing on sand or prints in snow, through which the hunters of the Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic times communicated. The return to the pictography of the snow carpet leads us straight to totemism.<sup>13</sup> Our text tries to indicate the materialism of the hand's movement and of the written mark. At the outset of human culture, writing was linked to the materiality of the hand's movement and the written mark, and all of its history has consisted in reducing their pluridimensionality and their polyphony in order to conceive of them through linearity.<sup>14</sup> Calligraphy only widened the gap between the spoken and the written; it will be considered, at best, a rhetorical figure. But we will see that calligraphy is an intoxicating rhetoric, which explodes the linguistic sign. Its process rejoins the intersemiotic suspension of Mallarmé: the calligraphic stroke buries the linguistic sign in geometry and disperses it in the platonic artifice of forms. The calligraphic letter is no longer exactly a letter, but rather something between a letter and a musical note.<sup>15</sup>

Let us go back to the case of tattooing. Let us begin with Février's contention that “[i]t is with the material sign, the heir of the symbol, that writing truly begins.”<sup>16</sup> Writing was a unique composition/reduction of the hand's movement and the written mark. Meanwhile, thanks to gestural figuration, humans were able to move signs from one space to another. So, a tattoo is written on the body in a characteristic inflection of the hand and of the ideographic and pictographic trace.<sup>17</sup> A tattoo's mark exists in the gap between sound and the written mark, a gap that defines what we normally mean by writing. Tattooing arises in this instability of semiotic systems. In its own way, it deploys pictographic movement. A witness to an archaic form of writing, tattooing acts, in an almost unchanging way, in the domain of a difference so forgotten

and so foreshortened that the scene opens upon a decorative meditation on death. I bring together these two words (*decoration* and *death*) intentionally: we think that the avoidance of meaning and interpretation is the worst violence that we can inflict upon knowledge. To disappropriate the body in this way, to betray the hierarchy of its values, and to note, by a whirling artifice, a false mask of death: the tattoo is born through this rhythm alone—a decorated body whose scriptural nudity removes death. It is not a matter of magic, or of a theoretic sleight of hand in regard to writing, but it is theorizing *the simple prolongation of a point of view* with/against us, under the angle of which the body-object no longer exists in the tattooed body. Thus, to weaken one type of knowledge about writing, to transform it into decoration, is to proceed unstably to the extreme end of productive disinterestedness.

In its essence, the tattoo is an ideo-pictographic motif. What is fascinating is that humans never stop giving themselves over to the geometric vibration of dead signs: the motif of a tattoo, of a carpet, of pottery, of a patterned scarf. The connections among these systems are far from being clear, but the connection between tattoos and pictography is now known. Février writes:

In this particular case, we understand even more clearly, however in a much more evolved form, the relation between tattooing and written signs. We allude to the mysterious writing of Nsibidi. It was practiced at the start of the century by the members of a secret society in southern Nigeria. It isn't even clear that it was a system of writing in the strict sense, which is to say a system for the notation of speech in its full form. It is rather a collection of symbols, of ideograms, each of which has a magical value unto itself. They are often tattooed on the body. They generally have a heightened pictographic character, and the origin of their meaning can be established in many cases: if the meaning often escapes someone who isn't initiated, it is more than clear to someone to whom the more-or-less schematic system of representation has been explained. And so the sign for money corresponds to bent leather bars; the sign for the conflict of contradictory acts of testimony is

two lines, one straight, the other curvy, entangled in each other; the sign for the idea of commerce is symbolized by a man (a merchant) at the fork in a road. They are small amusing enigmas more than a coherent system of writing. They remain interesting primarily, we repeat, for the relation they establish between the graphic sign and tattoos.<sup>18</sup>

But what can we hope to gain from a code whose contextual logic escapes us? The analyst following in Février's path would strive to their utmost to explain tattoos by the totemic mark, the differential mark that has relevance only in its position with respect to the metaphoric mode of classification.<sup>19</sup> This inevitable encounter with the spoken word led us to separate the analysis of geometric forms from onomastic references.<sup>20</sup> The game, thus defined, is the motif of the gyratory difference of which we willingly speak.

So, to summarize, tattooing, seen as a graphic game, runs up against a certain metaphysics of being. The loss of context leads to the loss of the original object, and geometric form leads to the disfiguration of the subject. A simple decorative motif plays a subtle role in the ruin of the dialectic of subject and object.

Methodologically, the graphic game has a very limited rhythm, confined to a small repertory of signs, several *stoicheia*—which will permit, optimally, a mathematical-geometric construction. It is a repertory that is not defined by a system of oppositions but that involves the creation of a number of exercises from a dot, from a nib. The code that will be used is pure idiolect. Another methodological possibility will be to “identify the microphysical code”<sup>21</sup> buried in our bodies. But the obvious risk will be to return to the illusion of a bio-cosmogonic language inscribed in our body. It is true that acupuncture works like this, but the code of this other form of tattooing is open to analysis since it is used to cure sickness. For what would sickness be without a code?

Clearly, the *stoicheia* trace their origins back to specific mythograms, some of which are still used, such as the hand in Arab culture, for instance. Their symbolic heft sometimes weighs on us,



worries us. Subconsciously. But others, the majority, come into and out of life as hollow signs. Our future task will be to recompose them as a group through a timely reading suggested by a specific place in our text. It will still be necessary to allow a geometric pleasure to float in the critical space that pierces it.

To make this geometric wager clear—this loss of subject and object reabsorbed within the pure sign (and not in meaninglessness)—we are led to revise the normal point of view on *decoration*, as part of tattooing or otherwise.<sup>22</sup> Different from the linear expansion of words, a system of graphic signs provokes a polyphonic game. Obviously, this is a rhythm lacking syntax, which belongs to language; it is a rhythm—a formula for meaning—in which everything is held obstinately inside the symmetrical circle, the horizon of myth, and unfolds in the pleasure of sophisticated candor. This is the only understanding of graphic representation that will allow us to write a tattooed woman. Or, write to her, if you will. At the very least, this narrative perspective is suspended in a material gesture.

How could we write this woman? In our case,<sup>23</sup> the creation of a body invokes a particular divine choice; the tattooed Muslim body obeys specific rules of implementation and spacing. For the most part, in Morocco, we tattoo just one side, the front, while Polynesians tattoo the entire body. Add to this one more difference: the woman can tattoo the front of her body, and the man can only tattoo his hand, arm, and forearm. That is to say that the hand never leaves the domain of writing. We tattoo the way we write, which is to say, giving privilege to our right side, which does not destroy symmetry: lines are struck on the body in a motif parallel to it and that passes over its forehead, chin, and between the breasts. Lines indicate desire. There is no center, except the place of its own reading, of its own perversity, blessed by God or not.

Let us call this group of drawings decorating the body a “fabric”: in the word *fabric*, there is the idea of a microphysical composition of material, the idea of a rhythmic space, and, *last but not least*, the notion of writing. We will see that this play on words—like every art of the bagatelle—is valuable; in reality, certain motifs exist just as commonly in

rugs as they do on tattooed bodies. Fabric does not obey any known syntax; it consists of a repertory of geometric figures that is easy to analyze. Let us call both the fabric and the geometric forms that cross several semiotic systems “migratory signs.” The goal is to dissolve our discourse through movement of this sort.

I asked how we can write this woman. I propose two exercises. The reader will have to choose one composition.

#### A) Basic Forms

These are the *stoicheia* (fig. 1): the dot (or a series of dots); a tattoo can be as small as a dot, which is the basis of our prologue, if you recall; the straight line and the decorations that come from it; cruciform decorations; star decorations; V-shaped decorations; the chevron; diamonds; and circles. The production of a piece of fabric is guided by two movements: (1) a social idiolect in which several signs suffice to produce a local semiotic system (a tribal semiotics, for

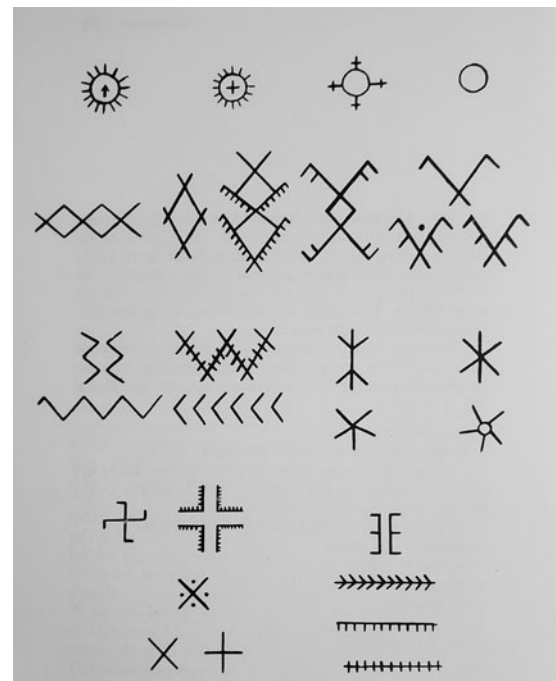


FIG. 1. Tattoos: basic designs. Image courtesy of Abdelkébir Khatibi Foundation, Rabat.

example); (2) a personal idiolect, the style of the person making the tattoo. A repertory of signs such as this, which is often without meaning, does not seem to obey any rule prescribing location on the body. It is the idiolect that decides.

## B) The Subverted Body

Which graphic economy does the first body obey (fig. 2)? The choice of signs is aleatoric, in the way that we remove them and draw them in correspondence with the fleeting moments of our pleasure—a pleasure made possible by a decision of disfiguration: namely, the subversion of the prohibitions that bind the Muslim body. This allows the expansion of other unnamed values and the implementation of signs with a different spatiality, annotated in a new manner on the different places of the body. By the spacing of pure signs, we are then able to generalize a rhythm for polyphonic reading. We suggest that

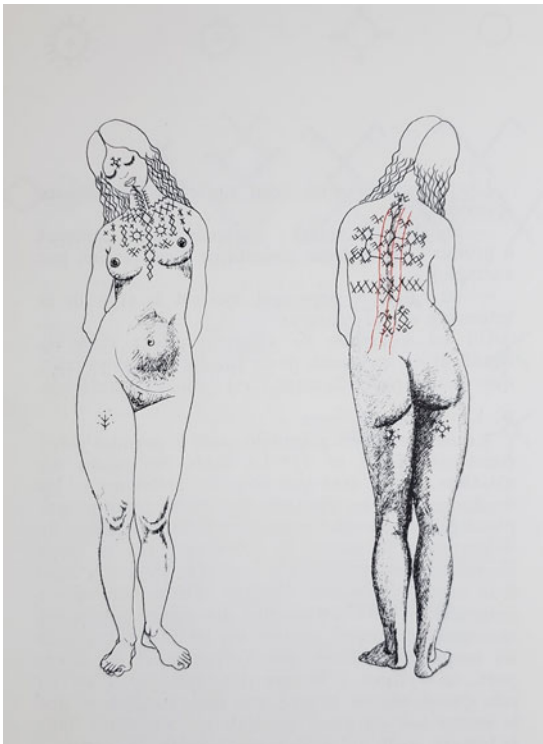


FIG. 2. The subverted body: tattoos. Image courtesy of Abdelkébir Khatibi Foundation, Rabat.

chance intervenes here, and that the center is a gyrotory point that annihilates itself in the act of interpretation. This will be what helps us take back the body.

According to historians, boustrophedon writing (the turning of the ox)<sup>24</sup> was developed alongside agriculture. In such a system, “the visual economy of reading obeys a law that is analogous to that of agriculture.”<sup>25</sup> Interpretation is suspended in a dual system of graphic representation that illustrates the relation between culture and nature: the human writes the way he works; eroticism develops from this movement. The Arabic word *khad*,<sup>26</sup> which means writing, calligraphy, and penmanship, also means a straight furrow, a dug-out line, or a line traced into sand by a finger or stick. Arabic calligraphy often invokes decorative motifs recalling this type of writing.

What does this have to do with our argument? A famous verse of the Qur’an says, “Your wives are [like] your fields, so go into your fields whichever way you like.”<sup>27</sup> From this verse, we could be justified in thinking that anal sex with a woman is acceptable, an interpretation contested by certain theologians. We will talk most directly of Islam, that boustrophedon place of our speech. But the interpretation of the metaphor in its sodomite sense requires a hierarchy: fornication begins from the front, then precedes to the rear. If a man first penetrates the woman’s vagina from behind, then, according to Jabir, misfortune will follow: the baby will be born with only one eye.<sup>28</sup> The order of sex follows a sacred rhythm. And sodomy, according to theology, is evil, because the ass is the place of the devil. We would say it is all legend, but the sexual prohibitions analyzed by Freud invoke a mythic discourse in no lesser degree.

The ideal Muslim rite adds a divine word, the enunciation of the first Qur’anic phrase *bismillah*, to the pleasure of fornication. According to Cheik Nafzawi, reading the Qur’an is good foreplay. The erotic is granted twice by God: by the Book, and by the technical and ritual order by which each part of the body is accorded its function.

Let us return to the act as it announces itself and subverts itself—disfigures itself—on our decorated

body. According to aesthetic paleontology, freeing the face and the hands from nature was a crucial separation. That the spatial symbolism of religion sets forth a repressive logic for the different bodily functions has nothing surprising to it. Except that the equilibrium that liberates the face/language keeps the hand/figuration within an ordered rule of values: the center (the trace of God) and the subject (a simulacrum of such an image) appear in overdetermined locations on the body.

Always linked to this metaphysical horizon, our fore/play consists of defining tattooed fabric in a general fashion. Fore/play: front, back. Displacement in this way: the back, the thighs, the buttocks are now joined to our text. Fittingly, the scene of spatial concepts is reabsorbed into the time of desire. The permutation in the chain of semiotic terms, the creation of a pure sign (anaphora), by which it is necessary to take up again the cross-analysis of fabrics, inching outside the metaphysical circle. Acting as gestural transition in transition (this “activity” by which the scene is composed), tattooing is, with little theoretical overwriting, the undoubtedly banal state of a silence, a solitude.

In Islam, if the face is visible, it must be protected, either by the veil, of course,<sup>26</sup> or also by its double, the tattoo; and by the double of the double—a tattoo in henna or in *hargus*,<sup>27p</sup> whose color intervenes to illustrate another migration. This leakage of repertory elements again marks the tension between logography and a system of graphic representation. The most important type of Moroccan tattooing is the *‘ayyacha* (between the eyes). The body is first split on the forehead, between the eyebrows. This often appears in a basic form: *three vertical dots* or *three horizontal dots*. Herber indicates as well the use of a chevron, recalling a rug design, or rather the ornamental circumference of cruciform motifs. Let us call this sign the “third eye” (*toë*). Traditionally, *toë*<sup>28</sup> protects against the evil eye, but what is evil, in our case? Here, *toë* marks a double trajectory, in which the graphic economy of the precursor exchanges the sign (the eye) for another sign (*toë*), the median organizing the body, one part against the other. Then, lower in the body, which has now been entered into a system of graphic

representation, two doubles of *toë* decorate the buttocks. The archaic triad finds a position that is symmetrically doubled, then annulled in the suspension of front and back: the two-step of writing.

The *siyyala* is a tattoo on the chin, drawn vertically from the lower lip to the bottom of the chin, then continued onto the throat and the chest with a decoration from a Berber rug. Herber asks naively, “Why don’t the chest tattoos have any relation to the neckline of clothes?” Tattoos, as written clothes, defy voyeurism: the written clothes are a body. Their iconic fantasy is invoked in a simple and violent gesture of touching, and an orgasm travels through this in a choreographic mobility. The celebration of tattooing is antivoyeuristic: its double game produces the pure sign originating from the body and vice versa, in the same way that the geometric game becomes indistinct (without a metaphysical fusion) and follows a gyratory movement—that is, a transgression that *travels*.

*Toë*, generalized fabric, and a decoration above the pubis (called *wachma fugu*, literally, “tattoo on top”), these carry over onto the back—this is *our* decisive motif—by three red lines: grafts, *qalams*. And so, with hardly any moral principles, the doxological body is occulted. This is the motif sketched out here: the movement of an artifice expanded in its milieu—the scriptural body. A red stripe.

### C) The Woman-Number

Because of another artifice, the geometric universe gives way to another form of writing, this time based on a system thousands of years old centered on the number five, or *khamsa*.<sup>29</sup> It is a pentagram usually known by the form of a starred polygon, but its creative possibilities are unlimited. *Khamsa* is a migratory sign that can be transformed into many geometric designs. From prehistory and the negative handprints of the Bovidian-era figures at Tassili to contemporary times and the hand of the Moroccan lottery, the pentagram stuns by its mobility: no subject can resist it. And yet, that is not to say that its decoration is simple: its schematics are extraordinarily varied (fig. 3). But taken as a *primary function* (J. Kristeva), it creates a vertiginous interval

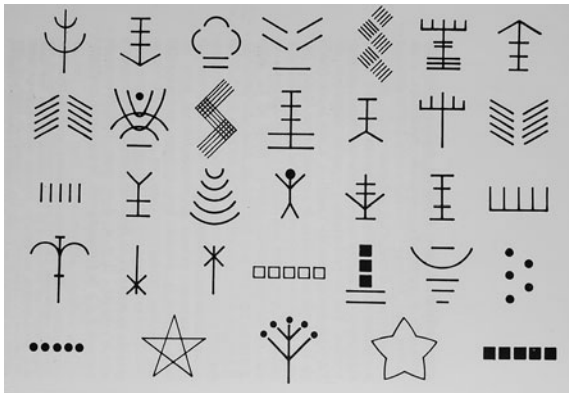


FIG. 3. Pentagrams: tattooed forms with five elements. Image courtesy of Abdelkébir Khatibi Foundation, Rabat.

between its inherent logographic symbolism and the annulment of the figuration-abstract opposition. The lexical richness of the pentagram (which is well known)<sup>30</sup> is not what interests us here, its rhythm retranslating one semiotic system into another; rather, its disconcerting capacity of *transport*; the pure sign doubles then departs: there is no rule of right-handedness. So, there is a third hand, just as there is a third eye. Usually a vertical motif/bar,<sup>31</sup> the open hand with an obvious prophylactic function (clear protection against the disorder of signs), *khamisa* is a supreme floating signifier, in which the infinity of doubles is detheatricalized in this mobile, floating representation.

There is no rule of right-handedness, which is replaced by the phallic iconography of the middle finger. When we say “*khamisa la ‘aynik*” (five on your eyes), or more literally, “*zob’ la ‘aynik*” (the penis on your eyes), we speak without doubt of a great desire—that of a letter intercalated inside a doubled gesture: the middle finger and the penis flip back and forth in the same insult, in the same hilarious laughter. This brings to mind this childhood couplet:

*khamisa la ‘aynik al-m’amcha*  
*tasbah mt’amcha qad al-hamssa*  
 five on your gummy eyes  
 to make them as hard as chickpeas!

The middle finger of the child makes clear the contradictory body language of sexual repression. It is

an exclusive, violent digit, animated by a drowned meaning: the paternal image is changed by outside laughter. But let us leave this anecdotal substitution of the middle finger of the right hand and return to another anecdote about pentagrams that has a more radical intersemiotic quality: in the Sahara, on the eve of a wedding, the *hannana* (woman who decorates hands with henna) removes the fiancée’s henna, then touches the hand of the person nearest her, and so on and so forth, until everyone in attendance is symbolically tattooed: a platonic gesture, an ultimate tattoo. This is semiotic superabundance: *khamisa* removes the tattoo and erases that thing on whose existence it is based, and by which the virgin—before the breaking of the hymen<sup>32</sup>—gives herself over to a scattering of the sign and of space. We would be also tempted to dream diaphanously of another transport: the theoretic interval where pleasure and its rhythmic difference are erased.

But this slightly hysterical vision of female genitalia must be dismissed for the time being. For two reasons. The first is that this vision, according to popular tradition, can chase away a wild animal (or reader): this is not our intersemiotic objective. The second is more divine: according to an interpretation that aligns with ours, *khamisa* would be a material transposition of the name of God, God being the contraction of the article and the Arabic word for divinity.<sup>33</sup> But the hand far predates Islam, and so this explication is a moment of chaos quickly recuperated by the calligraphic game. We are still within the horizon of theology.

Having commented on these anecdotes, we can quickly locate the geometric game of *khamisa*. In addition to the features that define it as an anaphora, *khamisa* doubles its being as a number: the five becomes four or three (an archaic triad?), or simply *one* floating yet perceptible form. Each time, the doubled image erases the number that it represents. “I would like to die,” says the number five. “Start by moving into the gap,” respond the other numbers. Here, this gap makes concrete the rubric for a tattoo that we present here as “the second immobile body” (fig. 4). It is a pendant made of five cowries strung horizontally, two above and three below.

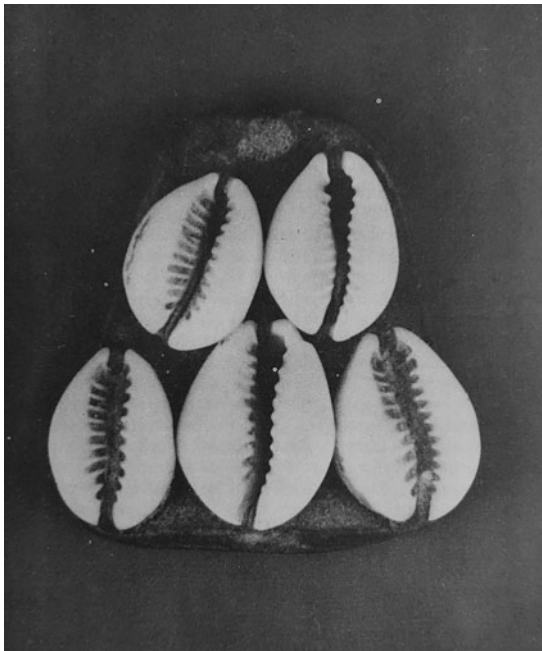


FIG. 4. Khamsa: five cowries stitched together. Image courtesy of Abdelkébir Khatibi Foundation, Rabat.

Tattoos in numbers:  
*khamsa/vulva/rhythm.*

#### 4. An Economy of Signs

As written clothing, tattoos possess an elemental repertory of signs that resists theories of representation. We have spoken of the *geometric* image up till here not because it is the origin of all tattooed decoration but because this economy of the sign makes the act of interpretation pivot and adjust each time. So, our preceding fore/play subverts the doxological body through playing with the opposites of right/left and front/back and while suggesting another motif of symmetry.

In fact, these displacements do not remove us from the hold of doxology. It is necessary to take up the meditation on another level, in particular, that of the economy of exchange (of signs). An astonishing parallel exists between the system of tattooing (its economy) and card games, a parallel admirably analyzed by Claude Lévi-Strauss.<sup>34</sup> What do we exchange while playing cards? There

is a *graphic exchange*: one illustrated sign replaces another, in a repetition that dissolves the present, which, in relation to “Truco,” suggested to Borges that “time is only a fiction.”<sup>35</sup> The pleasure of playing is that of dissolution, the rupture of time, and a lax economy of the sign: we exchange one dead sign for another, a movement whose metaphysical importance we understand in the rhetoric of Borges. The Borgessian text is a perpetual erasure, an illusory apparatus of texts operating one against the other. Perhaps the final trick of Borges is to have transformed his immense erudition (his mobile library) into a *false* economy of exchange: the setting of myths and narratives, their rotating entanglement returns ceaselessly to the figure of cyclical time. Borges is, without doubt, an innocent metaphysician who believes he is replacing one of our cards for another (one code for another): this is how the cyclical game and Borgessian rhetoric hypnotize us within a symmetrical horizon.

The second exchange of the card game is a *strategy of desire*:<sup>36</sup> the circulation of graphic signs that while dissolving the present is doubled by a silent discourse whose violence (although being regulated by an activated, *transitory* code) is an erotic automatic writing, which suspends the gesture of the appropriation of the other. In a waking dream, the card player moves on an “oblique axis” where the symmetry of the written mark and desire is ceaselessly foiled by a paradigmatic trembling. Look at a hand that plays cards: it throws cards *obliquely*.

The variety of tattooed fabric is dependent on the same oblique gesture. Symmetry is established through divine order, but the inscription on the body traces back to an archaic writing system before the advent of divine symmetry. Tattooing allows this erotic duel between symmetry and asymmetry, this economy rife with a romantic expenditure and a doubled, theatrical desire. The tattooed body is a graphic mark that disfigures the notion of appropriation. It is a form of writing that demands to be read, loved, and desired in its exceedingly emotional, chaotic movement.

A young Moroccan woman (keeping to popular culture) can tattoo herself on two occasions: at puberty and at marriage. The bodily inscription

supplements the economy of nature, the written mark identifying the cycle of blood in the first case, and the loss of the hymen in the second. Puberty is a disorder of somatic signs. To ritualize the erotic consists of redoubling suffering by the needle's tip. The fear of the pubescent girl is that of being swept away by a flood of blood; the tattoo is, then, a fiction of this fantasy, of this somatic disorder. It suggests a musical note—something incursive, grafted onto the body—that demands to be heard in the loneliest desire, the most silent desire, the most resistant to articulation.

The same is true for the hymen. By which form of body language should it be named? In this case, it is not sufficient to say the tattoo is the link between nature and culture;<sup>37</sup> the hymen is

as protective screen, the jewel box of virginity, the vaginal partition, the fine, invisible veil which, in front of the hystera, stands *between* the inside and outside of a woman, and consequently between desire and fulfillment. It is neither desire nor pleasure but in between the two. Neither future nor present but between the two. It is the hymen that desire dreams of piercing, of bursting, in an act of violence that is (at the same time or somewhere between) love and murder. If either one *did* take place, there would be no hymen.<sup>38t</sup>

We do not have the time here to analyze Derrida's rigorously delirious essay on the hymen, but, while applying his analysis to the tattoo, we would escape anthropological and sociological reduction (we refer to the theory of rites of passage, but it is precisely the *passage* that is a problem) and also understand better the rhythm of tattooing in the economy of signs, its antilogographic function, and the irreducibility of its mark.

We have suggested a parallel between somatic economy and graphic economy. We must separate their many effects, starting first with color. Because color tattoos are often temporary, they are done in henna and hargus.<sup>39</sup> Blood—the color of abduction, the color of the disorder of signs—is an excess of a Freudian drive. It is the divine, paternal color, which introduces a hierarchy of separation in the rainbow. The loss of the hymen is not a murder. It

suggests the palimpsest and theater: often the bloody sheet of the marriage bed is shown in public. At the same time, red is the naturalized color that sets in motion the rotation of the rainbow's colors. Celebration: song, dance, culinary ritual, the hysterical cries of the bearer of the bloody sheet—so many swirling gestures that on this occasion give the tattoo the value of an overdetermined inscription.<sup>40</sup>

There are different ways of preparing henna, each meant for a specific part of the body, especially the hands and the feet. We will return later to the technique's details; for the moment, it is enough to say that after the henna is applied and dries, its crust is removed. The color *red-yellow* changes according to the rhythm of the days and disappears after ten to fifteen days. The color *between* abduction and legal appropriation, *between* the hymen and the satisfaction of pleasure, henna lasts for the entire time after marriage when sex is still difficult and laborious. To cook up sex, as we will see, is a precise art, an aphrodisiacal medicine of the most sophisticated sort, in which perfume will be a musical, gyratory place: written mark, perfume, music—this relay (so Baudelairean) will return as the subject of our text on Cheikh Nafzawi.

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1. Cf. *De la grammatologie*, Éd. de Minuit, 1967, and *Sémiologie et grammatologie, informations sur les sciences sociales*, 1969. Cf. also F. Wahl, *La structure, le sujet, la trace*, in *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?*, Le Seuil, 1968.

2. Cf. also the different approach of Roland Barthes's beautiful book *L'empire des signes (le Japon)*, Skira, Geneva, 1970.

3. This is essentially what the linguist Émilio Alarcos Llorach says in "Les graphèmes du point de vue graphématique" in *Langage*, Gallimard, 1968, pp. 551–595.<sup>a</sup>

4. Cf. J. Herber, "Notes sur les tatouages au Maroc," *Hespéris*, Rabat, 1st and 2nd trimesters, 1949.

5. *Le folklore de l'Ancien Testament*, P. Geuthner, Paris, 1924.

6. Notice that this "sign" is found among Moroccan Jews, who tattoo in this fashion the foreheads of babies. We also know that, for Islam, the forehead is the place of thought: "You can see the hostility on the faces of the disbelievers when Our messages are recited clearly to them" (*Qur'an* 22.71).<sup>c</sup> According to tradition, the Antichrist will come with a sign on his forehead: K. F. R. (kafir).

7. *Bismallah*, a primordial Qur'anic phrase: "In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful."

8. One book dedicated to Arab painting, Richard Ettinghausen's *La peinture arabe* (Skira, 1962), skirts this movement; it affords an undue importance to the art of miniatures, which is a minor art in Arab culture. This art allows the West to conceal difference.

9. At least that is what Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes speculates, *Les institutions musulmanes*, Flammarion, 1953, pp. 59–60.

10. While he had originally chosen the word "stigmataes," Hamid Bénani settled on this very word, *wechma*, for the title of his film. In the final cut, he opted for *Wechma*, with *Traces* as the subtitle. This lexical tripolarity is apparent at the level of the film's combinatorium.

11. Aesthetic paleontology teaches us a lesson in modesty. Cf. André Leroi-Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole*, A. Michel, vol. 1, 1964, and vol. 2, 1965.

12. *Crayonné au théâtre*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 1945, p. 304.

13. Cf. J. G. Février, *Histoire de l'écriture*, Payot, 1949, p. 18.<sup>1</sup>

14. Derrida's work is crucial for the entirety of this debate.

15. This unstable relation between music and calligraphy was perceived by C. Lévi-Strauss, cf. the opening of *Le cru et le cuit*, Plon, 1964.

16. Février, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

17. Ideography: writing in words. It is different from pictography, which is composed of successive elements linked to "real" objects and symbols.

18. *Op. cit.*, pp. 30–31.

19. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Le totémisme aujourd'hui*, PUF, 1962.

20. Cf. further on, part 6.

21. Cf. Umberto Eco, "Sémiologie des messages visuels," *Communications*, no. 15, 1970.

22. A. Leroi-Gourhan writes about decoration, "It is not impossible to think that a study of Paleolithic art oriented in a certain way would introduce surprising new facts into linguistic consideration," *op. cit.*, p. 246.

23. The corpus under study is Moroccan.

24. While turning from one line to another, like oxen from one furrow to another.

25. Jacques Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 408.<sup>m</sup>

26. Speaking broadly, the face is covered with a cloth veil or by simply covering the mouth with the hand.

27. Cf. part 5.

28. Anaphorically, *oē* means the eye in the eye.

29. Called "the hand of Fatima" in the vulgate and in imperial lingo, a nonsensical phrase. It isn't the sense of owning that defines the pentagram but its vacuity and its migration as a sign.

30. Cf. J. Herbert, "La main de Fathma," *Hespéris* 2nd trimester, 1967,<sup>l</sup> and especially D. Champault and A. R. Verbrugge, *La main, ses figurations au Maghreb et au Levant*, Catalogue du Musée de l'Homme, Series B, Paris, 1965.

31. This verticality is attested to in radical ways by the painter Mohamed Melehi: "The vertical direction holds the rhythm of the human being. For me, everything vertical is living. Rain falls

vertically, we pray vertically, the number one is vertical. Plants grow from the ground vertically. One vertical band next to another signifies order, succession and continuity. It is this order that I saw missing in the world created by humans, which I projected into my collages," in *Souffles* no. 7/8, Rabat, 1967.

32. Cf. the rigorous and admirable analysis of Derrida on the hymen in Mallarmé's writing, "La double séance," in *La dissémination*, Le Seuil, 1972.

33. Cf. Champault and Verbrugge, *op. cit.*

34. "Each of our card-designs corresponds to a twofold necessity and must assume a double function. It must be an independent object, and it must serve for the dialogue—or the duel—in which two partners meet face to face. It must also play the role which is assigned to each card, in its capacity as a member of the pack, in the game as a whole. Its vocation is a complicated one, therefore: and it must satisfy demands of more than one sort—symmetrical, where its functions are concerned, asymmetrical where its role is in question. The problem is solved by the use of a design which is symmetrical but yet lies across an oblique axis. (An entirely asymmetrical design would have sufficed for the role but not for the function; and vice versa in the case of a design that was wholly symmetrical.) Once again we have a complicated situation based upon two contradictory forms of duality, and resulting in a compromise brought about by a secondary opposition between the ideal axis of the object itself and the ideal axis of the figure which it represents."<sup>r</sup> *Tristes tropiques*, Plon, 1955, p. 199.

35. Truco is a Spanish game similar to tarot cards. Cf. *Evaristo Carriego, Le truco*, Le Seuil, 1969.<sup>s</sup>

36. We prefer here this expression over the cliché *communication*.

37. Cf. C. Lévi-Strauss, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

38. "La double séance," *La dissémination*, p. 241.

39. Cf. part 5.

40. Cf. the analysis of color and its triple register in J. Kristeva, *Peinture: Cahiers théoriques* 2/3, 1972.

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

a. Khatibi seems to be recalling this work from memory. The article and book titles are "Les représentations graphiques du langage" and *Le langage*.

b. Biblical translations in this article are taken from the *New International Version*.

c. Khatibi mistakes the Qur'anic reference, which is from 22.72. Qur'anic translations in this article are taken from M. A. S. Abdel Haleem's translation of the Qur'an.

d. Exodus 13.9.

e. Revelations 7.2–8.

f. Revelations 19.16.

g. Exodus 20.4.

h. This is the original English translation from Lombroso (802).

i. Khatibi cites Herodotus, who discusses tattoos at several places in *The Histories*.

j. Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-'Arab* (1290).

k. I have used Barbara Johnson's translation from Mallarmé's

*Divagations* (130).

- l. The correct date of publication is 1948.
- m. The English translation of the quotation from Derrida is taken from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translation of *Of Grammatology* (288).
- n. *Qur'an* 2.223.
- o. This refers to a hadith based on the words of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Haram al-Ansari, a prominent companion of the Prophet Muhammad. Online sources contradict Khatibi's rendition, stating that the hadith speaks of a child being born cross-eyed, not with one eye. The hadith states that Jabir had heard from Jews that this form of sex led to these results, and not that he knew it himself. See Kathir.
- p. For a full consideration of hargus decoration in North Africa, see Sienna.
- q. Khatibi mistakenly gives the date of the first publication as 1967 when it is 1927.
- r. This translation is from John Russell's translation of Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes tropiques* (176).
- s. This incomplete citation refers to Françoise-Marie Rosset's translation of Jorge Luis Borges's biography of the Argentine musician Evaristo Carriego.
- t. This translation is from Barbara Johnson's translation of Derrida's *Dissemination* (212–13).

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