

An Introduction to Eduardo Cadava's essays on Fazal Sheikh

The three essays included here were written at different moments and in relation to different contexts and invitations. Together, they form a kind of triptych and, as such, are to be read in relation to one another. The first of the three essays, 'Palm Reading,' had its earliest beginnings nearly eighteen months after 9/11. At a moment in which the effort to memorialize the victims of this tragedy was legible everywhere, I wanted to bring attention to the singular deaths of Afghani men and women that, for me, were being overshadowed and erased by the focus on the people who died so tragically in the World Trade Center attacks. Fazal's work in *The Victor Weeps* became a lever through which I could evoke not only the deaths and suffering that had punctuated the history of Afghanistan but also the devastation that was the signature of the present war and that, as already was clear, would continue to take place even until today. I delivered this lecture in various countries over the few years and, as a result of its circulation and its having come to Fazal's attention, he asked me to write on *Moksha* in relation to his exhibition, *Beloved Daughters*, at the Princeton Art Museum at Princeton University in the fall of 2007. The essay 'Of Veils and Mourning' was written for this occasion and, since my encounter with this project was mediated by my earlier encounters with Fazal's work, I deliberately staged its relation to 'Palm Reading' by citing (in Benjaminian mode, "without citation marks") certain passages from this earlier essay. Among other things, this strategy enabled me to perform, within the movement of my writing, what I wanted to convey: that reading always begins elsewhere. This textual insight has its counterpart in Fazal's work and, indeed, moves like a kind of red thread throughout it, since he often circulates images from one project to another one, from earlier projects into later ones. This is evident in his book of portraits, for which my third essay, 'Trees, Hands, Stars, and Veils,' was written. While the portraits that compose this book initially were produced in relation to the projects in which they first appeared, they are presented here in a way that is neither chronological nor situated only in relation to those projects. The effects of this presentation are various, but perhaps the most significant one is that it helps put the different projects (and the portraits and photographs that comprise them) into relation with one another, into a kind of series—as if they were all of a piece, and as if they were an invitation for us to follow a red thread that perhaps is legible throughout the entirety of Fazal's corpus.

By placing earlier images in new contexts—and, in regard to my own practice in writing these three essays, by placing earlier passages in new contexts—they become part of a new and different constellation. What seems to be the same is now different, and the image or passage takes on what Ralph Waldo Emerson would call "a new and fervent sense." By staging a relation between the past and the present—and this is what happens when images or passages are recontextualized in the present "without marks"—the present set of images or texts become a site that brings together different voices and temporalities and, in doing so, suggest that an image or text can never exist "on its own." In each instance, then, I have been guided by at least two desires: the first, Emerson's desire to have us understand that reading is quotation (which means, among other things, that when we read we inevitably reveal our indebtedness to all the texts that countersign this act of

reading), and, second, Benjamin's desire to practice "the art of citation without citation marks" (which, following Emerson, I would call simply "the art of reading"). As Emerson tells us, "only an inventor knows how to borrow," and we should all be inventors.

I want to thank Fazal for everything that his work has permitted me to invent and say. His work has been—and remains—not only a provocation to thinking but also a kind of training manual on how to read images historically, on how to conduct one's life.

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Princeton, Fall 2010