

Christian Moraru
Univ. of North Carolina, Greensboro

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**Object-Thinking and the Ontology of Translation:
Ben Lerner's *Leaving the Atocha Station***

“In translation,” Benjamin famously wrote, “the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air.” “World literature,” Damrosch would paraphrase him, “is writing that gains in translation.” Today, I want to look a bit into this *gain*. How does it take place? What kind of novelty is the translator producing?

I realize the problem can be approached in several ways. That is because it is complex. Part of it is political. Works hardly known for their politics become feared for their political bite in translation and in the new, “politicizing” context of the target language. This has been the case in authoritarian regimes across the ages. Vice versa, literature invested in certain politics, let’s say radical politics, becomes politically lame, or its politics just gets lost in translation outside its original ambiance. Examples abound in all categories. There is, then, the sociological dimension of the issue. Once translated, writers land in more hospitable places where they enjoy warmer and wider reception than at home. Paul Auster’s popularity in France and Germany is a case in point. Or women can respond to translated material in ways which women elsewhere did not to the original. Tied into this is, of course, the economic side of translation, in and of itself a tangle of issues. One of them has to do with authors seeking to write these days for easier rendition into languages other than their native idiom and for a public larger than that of those writers’ countries.

In what follows, I want to look at the dynamic of translation and novelty from a standpoint I would call ontological. I’m basically interested in the *new*, that is, in the making of something not there yet, something that is a gain or *added value* that accrues in translation. I’m not saying forget about “lost in translation.” But I want to think about what can be

founded in it, about an initial absence in the original, or quasi absence, which becomes present in the translated text as that text itself acquires a unique presence as an object.

A poem, like anything that exists, rises into sovereign thingness or objecthood or, better yet, we come to appreciate it, once we no longer approach it as a tool, prosthesis, or resource—like something to use, transcend, leave behind. This is what great translations can give the translated: the status of full presence. But this coming into presence, this world making that happens in translation, can be the model of world making in general. Translation is not, of course, solely linguistic; it can be physical or existential as well. It can mean moving between languages or moving between previously unrelated pointed in space, time, or culture, building connections and bridges. Either way, translation is *correlational*; not only is the translated poem a sovereign object; it also correlates objects, constellating them into new objectual configurations, new worlds.

I offer this argument as a series of glosses to a contemporary American classic, poet, critic, and novelist Ben Lerner, specifically to his 2011 novel *Leaving the Atocha Station*. *Atocha* is a postmillennial US classic, also because it instantiates the onset of a new, late-global era literary culture. This is the culture of works “born in translation,” to quote Rebecca Walkowitz. This means that translation does not simply “come after,” and on this account it is as original as the “original” itself. Moreover, not only is translation *not* a derived event in relation to an original; translation also comes first because it has already come *in* the “original,” which may explain why so many writers insist that they do not write but translate, make accessible. One way to understand this claim is mystical, as in Benjamin. Anyway, the point is that this translation—the source text as “always already” translated—is imperfect from the get-go. Or, as Benjamin says, history dulls it, wears it out. This is where “actual” translation comes in to either speak *what the text has left unspoken* or to check the ebb into meaninglessness of that which the text did speak. The translator, then, is but an author’s

equal-footing partner, for writing calls for somebody capable not just of rendering it “equivalent” in another language but of *completing* it.

This translational completion of the author’s project, I propose, is dramatized by Lerner’s book. In other words, I will be dealing today with *fictional translation*, with translation that occurs *in* a work of fiction, although, imagined as they are, the translation episodes and references involved are plausible and in keeping with the geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century. In the novel, the translator’s task is to make up for that which in the original remains incomplete, flawed, and essentially absent, not there. This job and the complex challenges that come with it are therefore as ontological as they are linguistic and cultural, for the translation’s brief is to turn that absence into material presence. To inject this materiality into translation, Lerner’s characters and the novelist himself focus on linguistic *and* material objects, on writing and translating as something they call “object-thinking.” In this kind of translation, objects arrange—or “constellate,” says *Atocha*’s protagonist—what is absent and trite into authentic presence, something “there” for the first time, including a certain understanding of the contemporary, of its catastrophic nature, as I will show at the end.

The character in question is an “American abroad.” His name is Adam. He is the narrating protagonist and Lerner’s autofictional alter ego. Like his author, who spent a year on a Fulbright in Spain roughly during the same 2003-2004 interval spanned by the plot, Adam is a Topeka, Kansas-born poet on a “research” fellowship in Madrid around the time of the “Spanish 9/11.” The book’s title reproduces the title of a poem by John Ashbery while also referencing the Atocha train station bombings. The novel details Adam’s daily routines, his love life, his struggle with Spanish, as well as with his work. He does write, but his poems are heavily derivative, a collage of chunks of his e-mail correspondence, unacknowledged

mistranslations from Lorca, etc. He does not think much of his work and does not think others would like it either.

Key to the book is a public reading at an art gallery where Adam reads a poem in English. He is preceded by his friend Tomás, who reads his own Spanish poems. Following Adam's reading, Arturo, the gallery owner, reads his Spanish translation of Adam's work. Teresa, Adam's friend, who is familiar with Adam's poems, suggests he read "the one about seeing [your]self on the ground from the plane and in the plane from the ground." He protests that "the poem wasn't *about* that, that poems aren't *about* anything," but, after Tomás recites his "hackneyed poem[s]," as Adam calls them, he reads it nonetheless:

Under the arc of the cello

I open the Lorca at random

I turn my head and watch

The lights slide by, a clearing

Among possible referents

Among the people perusing

The gallery walls, dull glow

Of orange and purple, child

Behind glass, adult retreating

I bit hard to deepen the cut

I imagined the passengers

Could see me, imagined I was

A passenger that could see me

Looking up . . .

Is Adam's poem better than Tomás's? Is it opening onto what is not yet? We will not know for sure until Arturo has read its translation. What is obvious, for now, is that Adam's work at

once makes itself and comments on its making. It does more, however, than just divulging its formula. It shows how its *ars poetica* doubles up as an *ars ontologica*. That is, the poem points to itself as both a meditation on and enactment of an aesthetic of coming into presence. As it reverse-engineers its own actuality, the text gestures to that which, in the text itself, appears to be traceable to and exchangeable for existents prior and exterior to it such as the scraps “borrowed” from Lorca and Lorca scholars like Jack Spicer, as well as other, non-belletristic “possible referents.” All these references, intertextual and otherwise, threaten to coral the poem’s semantics inside a ready-made, “about” world, to make it be *about* something that preexists. This does not happen because “Adam makes fun of his own method” while laying it bare, as Lerner himself says in an interview. Deep inside the counterfeit ontology of the poem, amid all the literary *bric-à-brac*, the “willful mistranslations,” as Lerner calls them in another interview, and the playacting involved in the *Atocha* scene, here referenced also, where Adam fakes a more serious injury than that resulted from another character’s punch, the poet’s gaze falls on a “clearing” where something else can be experienced authentically, “profoundly.”

This *Lichtung* is the horizontal projection of the vertical interval Adam “imagines” at the end of the poem between himself and himself as an other, or better yet, between himself and him experiencing himself as an other, again, over the span of the convex mirror that bestows self-speculative “depth” on experience **and authenticity, genuineness, and presence on that which** is experienced, be it the self or self-expression. Across this vastness and within the space in which the descriptive no longer holds sway, “[h]e shuts his eyes to see himself from above,” as Lerner writes in a different text—in a poem, actually (he is also a poet). The novelist recycles this sentence in Adam’s text so as to inscribe into the poem and into *Atocha* itself a *presencing* self-distance, a break in repetitive and superficially “numerical” routine where that which starts out as reiterative and shallow can instantiate a new potential of being.

As Adam himself surmises at the gallery, this break or opening is forced, rather infrequently, by “the intrinsic energies” of the poem itself despite its shortfalls. Usually, however, it is a certain response to the poem, by others, that loosens it up even more, “flattening” it out to unfold or expand inside it the very space in which the not-yet-present can present itself.

Arturo’s translation is such a response. For it is poised to further weaken and “fluidify” the poem’s references, be they intertextual or contextual, and generally that which Lerner, the critic, calls “deictics.” Deictic language essentially consists in those signposts—adverbs, pronouns, tense markers, etc.—that confine a text’s semantics to a more or less determinate set of possibilities. Words such as “yesterday,” “there,” and “she,” for instance, limit what the text may potentially mean to a place, time, and agent not today, here, and male. Or, Arturo’s translation sets out to unlock the original semiotically, by the same token subjecting the poetic object to more complex, linguistic and cultural transformations. This is how Adam recollects his reactions to Arturo’s reading of the Spanish version of his English poem. “At first,” he says, “I heard only”

so many Spanish words, but nothing I could recognize as my own; after all, there was nothing particularly original about my original poems, comprised as they were of mistranslations intermixed with repurposed fragments from deleted e-mails. But as the poem went on I slowly began to recognize something like my voice, if that’s the word, a recognition made all the more strange in that I’d never recognized my voice before. Something in the arrangement of the lines, not the words themselves or what they denoted, indicated a *ghostly presence behind the Spanish, that presence was my own, or maybe it was my absence*; it was like walking into a room where I was sure I’d never been, but seeing in the furniture or roaches in the ashtray or the coffee cup on the window ledge beside the shower signs that I had only recently left. Not that I’d

ever owned that particular couch or cup, but that the specific disposition of those objects, the way they had been lived with, required or implied me; not that I was suffering from amnesia or *déjà vu*, but that I was both in that room and outside of it, maybe in the park, and not just in the park, but also in innumerable other possible rooms and parks at once. *Any contingent object, couch or cup, “orange” or “naranja,” could form the constellation that I was, could form it without me, but that’s not really right; it was like seeing myself looking down at myself looking up.*

Adam’s self-recognition in Arturo’s translation is difficult but rewarding. On the other hand, recognizing Tomás, his style or “thing,” and his meanings, Adam tells us, is easy but fruitless. “To my surprise,” the American poet reports,

[Tomás] poem was totally intelligible to me, an Esperanto of clichés: waves, heart, pain, moon, breasts, beach, emptiness, etc.; the delivery was so cloying the thought crossed my mind that his apparent earnestness might be parody. But then he read his second poem, “Distance”: mountains, sky, heart, pain, stars, breast, river, emptiness, etc. . . . Maybe, I wondered **or** tried to wonder, I’m not understanding; maybe these words have a specific weight and valence I cannot appreciate in Spanish, **or** maybe he is performing subtle variations on a sexist tradition of which I am not in possession. As Tomás read a third poem, “Work Dream” **or** “Dream Work,” I forced myself to listen *as if* the poem were unpredictable and profound, as if that were given somehow, and any failure to be compelled would be exclusively my own. The intensity of my listening did at least return strangeness to each word, force me to confront it as sound and then to recapture the miracle of sound opening or almost opening onto sense, and I managed to suspend my disgust. I could not, however, keep this up; it required too much concentration to hear such familiar figurations as intensely strange, even in Spanish.

Ulrich Gumbrecht might argue that the Spaniard's poems and Adam's exemplify the divide between a "meaning culture" in which the object vanishes in attributions of meaning and a "presence culture" of "intrinsic" meaningfulness less dependent on claims submitted in or for it. Claims affect Adam's poetry too but leave a larger imprint on Tomás's and other speech acts in the novel whenever, plainly put, its speakers and writers make claims, not worlds, as they trade language, in its very use, for "transcendent" justifications, rationalizations, and more generally for "meaning"—more specifically, for a meaning constructed "hermeneutically," through semantic ascriptions that annul the meaningful object itself. Such claims come to nothing repeatedly in Tomás's poetry, and Adam's response to it rehearses this failure. But because, as poets, Tomás and Adam do not fail the same way, Adam's lack of success as Tomás's translator—for a translation his response is—also differs from how Arturo "fails" to render Adam into Spanish. The "intensity" Adam's translation achieves turns out shallow and unsustainable as Tomás and Adam himself after him get bogged down in the poems' deictic morass. All his translation can do is act out the urge and ineluctable failure of claim after claim—or, according to Allen Grossman in *The Long Schoolroom*, which Lerner mentions in *Atocha's* "Acknowledgements," the impossibility of the luring possibility of poetic references, statements, contentions, and the like. The mass of conflicting about-claims ends up crashing the system of Tomás's texts, and Adam's translation thereof follows suit, collapsing in the sterile zone where one possibility, instead of opening a window into potentiality, into what can be and stand on its own, is instantly exchanged for another and thus canceled out, "absented" by it.

This zone is barren in a postmodern sort of way. Absence here is the final score of a semiotic and ontological zero-sum-game kind of writing and translation in which what is about to be adjudicated as true or real is already overshadowed by an other whose own alternate awaits in the offing. Claimed and disclaimed time after time, things are trapped in

the limbo of “or.” They are neither upheld nor “negated” enough, wavering on the cusp of being and never quite making it. If Adam’s poetic “imposture” is brazen and cynically self-detached, Tomás’s dithers “unwitting[ly]” in between claims and counterclaims. Unlike Adam, he is naïvely overcommitted to their beguiling referentiality and despite the title of one of his poems, proves incapable of the inner distance or self-estrangement Adam’s translator builds on to carve out the space in which “*that other thing*” than paraphrases and references to what already is can gel.

Taking hold in this Rimbaldian self-distance, Arturo’s translation of Adam’s poem manages to reform the original into a presencing constellation, whereas Adam’s mental translation of Tomás’s work does not. One co-relates, forms a presence out of bits and pieces; channeled by the de-presencing “or,” the other just tracks the absencing crumbling of form and eventually of itself. As Adam’s translation comes to a head, Tomás’s poems do not avail themselves of the “project[ion] scree[n]” Arturo supplies to Adam’s work, and so they fall short of full presence. They exist as “dead medium,” substitutes that never get to do their job. Awaiting indefinitely their exchange for the real thing, they are “placeholder[s] for an art” postponed **sine die**. Their “actual[ity]” remains therefore flimsy and conventional (“familiar”), ever more drained by the meaning “scenarios” and related claims they successively elicit and discard.

Also stuck in the “or” gear of these warring hypotheses, Adam’s translation illustrates, more than Tomás’s writing itself, an entire onto-linguistic paradigm. Its traits are tentativeness, “undecidability,” and their “poststructuralist” derivatives: overabundance of inconsonant realities, paralyzing—rather than mobilizing—polysemy, elusiveness, uncertainty, insecurity, simulation, deceit, lying, and *Atocha* reviewers’ all-time favorite, the “imposter syndrome.” Expressively, psychologically, and otherwise, most of these are typical of postmodernism—of an unsparingly allusive, ironic, self-ironic, and playful poetics of

ambiguity grounded in a *weak ontology*. A stylistic operator of the latter, Lerner's obsessional "or" is a signifier of deferred meaning and presence. Under its thumb, neither what is being said nor being itself can be self-present because it is undermined, in all senses, by the alternatives in the wings. It can only act "as if" it was present, presented as it is by a deictics that no matter how referentially alluring it may sound, hardly makes good on the promises of its *als ob* ontology. For example, when Isabel comforts Adam after the incident his poem alludes to, "[s]he began to say something either about the moon, the effects of the moon on the water, or was using the full moon to excuse Miguel or the evening's general drama . . . Then she might have described swimming in the lake as a child, or said that lakes reminded her of being a child, or asked me if I'd enjoyed swimming as a child, or said that what she'd said about the moon was childish." Just a bit later, when Isabel resumes talking, Adam "heard . . . a list of things [he] thought were books or songs, hard times or hard weather, epoch, uncle, change, an analogy involving summer, something about buying and/or crashing a red car." The litanies of proposed yet immediately disputed or retracted possibilities make up a toxic syntax whose self-canceling patterns pepper the novel with volleys of "or," "and/or," "maybe," "whatever that meant," "although that's not even close," "but that's not really right," and their disjunctive, concessive, and outright negative brethren, sabotaging sentences just formulated and communication and representation broadly, over and over. Adam's wobbly Spanish is not the issue here. Even his American memories become hypothetical, and he doubts their accuracy once recollection gets on the "or"'s claim-cum-disclaimer narrative teeter-totter.

Arturo's translation need not be "accurate." In effect, its fidelity to the original—just another shot at referentiality—is, at best, beside the point. The point is the *form* the Spanish fashions by disengaging the English original and the American originator from the initial referents, imitated models, and collage; the point, compellingly argued by Grossman, is, in

his words, the “world making” and the “person making” the American poem’s stolen, deficient, and otherwise “impossible” form both holds in abeyance and makes possible in its Spanish avatar. Yet the poem’s English form is not hopelessly “bad” either, or, again, its badness, its second-hand effulgence and, relatedly, Adam’s “imposture” are not what matters here. According to Adam, his poems are not so much deformed by literary flaws and thefts but “in an important sense unformed.” In the linguistic trans-formations performed by Arturo, however, their “pure potentiality, [one] awaiting articulation,” gains a new ontological intensity and semantic fluidity. “Translation,” Adam expects, “would further keep my poems in contact with the virtual, as everyone must wonder what Arturo or Spanish was incapable of carrying over from the English, and so their failure, their **negative** power, was assured.”

But Arturo’s work does more than that. Unlike Adam’s, Arturo’s “failure” reaches *and sustains* a presencing “intensity.” The translation from jejune to authentic and from poseur to presence requires just that—the labor of translation. In this regard, Adam and, in a way, Lerner as well are translated into presence, or “born translated,” with the proviso that translation is here a “matter of form,” as Walkowitz also specifies in her analysis of *Atocha*. More precisely, the presence founded in Arturo’s translation is a function of that which begins as dysfunctional form, a precipitate of that form or a formation in the strongest sense of the term because, observes Adam, the Spanish translation and, through it, the author of the original also are effects of—and essentially are—forms “constellated” by other forms or objects. Where the transactional languages of commerce and high-school debate “spread you” as in Lerner’s latest novel, *The Topeka School*, the translational language of object constellations in Arturo’s version work to gather together, to *compose* a presence.

Such Latourian compositions, the poet-making and world-making “arrangements” they produce are here the ultimate task of the translator. Whether Arturo knows it or not, he is a compositionist. His Spanish composes Adam’s poem, Adam himself, and their world,

taking them not only beyond the repetitive, the internet downloads, the conventional, and other cheap rewards of reference but also past *via negativa* itself, into a positive negativity, if you will, where what has been “negated” and cleared out allows for a more affirming dynamic. The clearing—the *Lichtung*—requires a de-deictic travail that disarticulates the American poem, increasing its elasticity and stretching it out. Arturo softens the original’s “referents,” relaxing, displacing, and spacing them out to free up the room. In a way, he further “unforms” Adam’s poem but only to reshape both text and author into a form where potential meaning becomes actual and the heretofore imitative, absent meaning maker, present. Instead of going down the rabbit hole of references to the “meta” world beyond what forms and presents itself in translation, he assembles that world through his own words. These are the assembly lines of presence; disassembling the deictics that “pins down” the original and locks it into the delusory *aboutness mode* in which poetic form, author, and world absent themselves, they make the poem its “most available context” and fit it out for the assembling of presence. What blocks this process in Tomás’s writing and, consequently, in Adam’s reading or translation of it also is the syntactically disjunctive and ontologically disjoining play of “or.” By contrast, Arturo’s work operates conjunctively. Its translational thrust is not transactional, for it does not exchange words for worlds, but com-positional. Arturo juxtaposes things. He puts them side by side and together, constellating them into the intransitive presence that affords their co-presence in bigger constellations.

Arturo accomplishes all this because there is an element of translation, an incipiently compositional move back and forth across the space that, as pointed out earlier, starts opening up in Adam’s writing itself. This interval separates different “postures,” situations, and objects; the translator crosses it in all directions, and the result is a spiderweb of correlations. “All you are describing,” Teresa, the novel’s occasional *raisonneur*, tells Adam in Spanish, “is the personality of a translator. From apartment to protest, from English to Spanish.”

Notably, what Adam has just “described” in English, to her, with reference to her “style,” and following an extensive exchange in Spanish is a self-description. He too shuttles “between media,” idioms, his rented place and rallies, private and political, present and past, presence and absence, and so forth. When Teresa compares him to David Locke, the impersonator Jack Nicholson plays in Michelangelo Antonioni’s 1975 *The Passenger*, Adam “sa[ys] in [his] head,” although he has not seen the movie, that “she was simply describing the personality of a translator,” and he is right. Antonioni’s passenger, Adam’s (*I . . . / imagined I was / A passenger that could see me / Looking up*), Adam, and Lerner too ultimately are all the same, self-distant and builders of bridges across distances, com-posers of selves, things, and worlds. Adam even imagines himself “translat[ing] Teresa’s poems into English” and, also “in his head,” does translate them along with her casual Spanish. Moreover, the translation is no different in terms of both procedure and outcomes from Arturo’s. As Teresa’s poetry and language overall acquire presencing form and accede to objecthood in Adam’s mind, they “bec[o]me a repository for whatever meaning [Adam] assign[s] to it.” The “whatever” notwithstanding, this meaning is not arbitrary; it is made the same way Adam and Lerner make sense of Ashbery’s poetry and Arturo of Adam’s, viz., not deictically, by reference to a place, person, incident, feeling, politics, or “any particular thing,” but com-positionally, by assembling these objects, sometimes individually and other times by joining them up in more complex assemblages. For, once the object is posed in translation and its form, ontologically “charged,” is rendered opaque, intransitively *there*, further compositions may occur or, to be more exact, may be revealed prismatically, as the object’s surging energies wash over other objects and larger objectual conglomerates come into focus. “It was,” Adam himself explains,

as if she said: Think about the necklace. Think about the making of the necklace.

About Isabel’s brother notebook . . . Imagine her brother writing. Think of the little scrap of paper Teresa tore from her novel and put into your notebook. Think of the

hash transported inside one body as a solid and expelled and sold and then drawn into your body as vapor and gas. Think of the bombers purchasing the backpacks. *Always think of the objects*. Think of the necklaces and novels and bodies torn apart by the blast. Think of the making of the necklaces and the novels and the bodies and Isabel's brother in the crushed red car. But then think of a poster of Michael Jordan on the wall of Isabel's brother's room while he wrote the years down in the notebook. Where is that poster now. And think of the field opposite the telephone pole her brother wrapped the car around . . . You can stay there for as long as you want . . . Or you can enter the poster with the sea of cameras flashing as Michael Jordan jumps and you can leave the arena as the crowd is roaring and walk into the Chicago of the recent past where novels are being written and necklaces are being made and gases are being inhaled and dates are being memorized by brains and brains destroyed in crashes. You can see all of this from a great height and zoom out until it is no longer visible or you can zoom in on the writing hand or the face of the dead, zoom until it's no longer a face. Or you can click on something and drag it. You can adjust the color or you can make it black and white. You can view any object from any angle or multiple angles simultaneously or you can shut your eyes and listen to the crowd in the arena or the sirens slowly approaching the red car or the sound of the pen writing down the years as silver is hammered and shaped.

The specious, "click-and-drag" mimesis poised to photoshop the world instead of making it ends up taking a back seat to an objectual poetics that imbues Adam's writing with a thingness itself literally drawn to other things, so much so that the poem's language and the poet with it become the flowing movement ("without transition") to and between objects, an ability to "distribute [one]self among" them and capture their "shifting configuration" by acknowledging their being-there rather than claiming anything about them ("saying yes to

everything, affirming nothing”). From the paltry collage of internet junk, pilfered stories, and botched translations to this superior “configuration” of objects: fledgling in Adam, more advanced in Arturo, and brought to fruition in Lerner, this is the process that culminates in the composition of the contemporary. None of them define contemporaneity for they make no explicit claims about it; they act it out formally. They show, that is, how objects assemble it by entering into a certain combination. A material and cultural signature of our time, this historically unique arrangement is the contemporary, Adam’s and ours, or at least one of its faces. Objects “form” this contemporary, as “any contingent” knick-knacks “form” Adam (41) himself, and as writers, Adam and his author trace this formation.

Adam’s poetry, Arturo’s translation of it, and ultimately *Atocha* itself inhere in this tracing, in this “object-thinking” that leads from one object to another no matter where and what they are. The object system—the system of the contemporary—is thus reconstituted “democratically,” beginning with the jewelry Adam bought for Isabel. The picture that takes shape gradually, item by item, is an “exploded view” of the contemporary world. The objects in this *mise en abyme* image are among the novel’s main components, and they are spread across *Atocha*. Here, they cluster together as in the assembly diagram that comes with a new Ikea coffee table. What the picture represents, however, is neither hypothetical (“as if [Teresa] said” all this) nor inert, a mere scheme; it is actual because the featured objects already have ontological standing inside and outside the book. The plot has connected all these objectual dots, breathing story life into them, but their lives are more than fictional. The necklace, Isabel, and Isabel’s brother, fatal car wreck, and notebook may live exclusively “inside” Lerner’s imagination, but Adam—himself within the plot’s storyworld—keeps on doing the plot’s connecting work and splices *Atocha*’s narrative insides (Adam’s story) and the outside story (post-September 2011 history) together by practically adding 2004 to the historically memorable years jotted down in the notebook (“1933, 1066, 312 . . . 1936, 1492,

800, 1776”). Year of the “Spanish 9/11,” 2004 marks the transition “without transition” Adam effectuates, *in* the novel, to the Atocha bombers’ backpacks. With them, object-thinking pivots from his story to history, *in* which, with yet another turn of the ontological screw, novels and their diegetic necklaces are being made but also backpacks, and brains are crushed in imaginary and documented, individual and collective disasters. This is how Adam’s diagram articulates the catastrophic nature of the contemporary— contemporaneity as crisis, as permanence, endless nowness of disaster. In correlating the crashed red car, the body in it, and their “particular” novelistic circumstances, on one hand, and the train cars and bodies ripped apart by the Atocha explosions, on the other, the passage also reenacts the “intersections” of the private and the public and especially of the literary imagination and sociality on a planet on which there are fewer and fewer locations where one can sit out its disasters. Thank you.