Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon by Barbara Cassin et al (review)

Michael Punt

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White populations, its traditions of interactions between government and folks. American history—from Jane Addams' Hull House in nineteenth-century Chicago to the Tuskeegee Experiment to Philadelphia's Black Quantum Futurism—offer lessons, pro and con, while various contemporary scholarship limns our urban "socio-technical imaginaries."

Local boosters' "Smart Atlanta" vision is deconstructed in the chapter "Stories" as Atlanta's contribution to the long history of critical fabulations that too often reinforce who gets included, who gets excluded in the metropolis's vision of an improved future. This is especially true and germane when the urban information-gathering is essentially surveillance. DiSalvo enlisted a graduate student in his Participatory Approaches to Researching Sensing Environments (PARSE) project, and their multiple participatory workshops helped residents articulate what positive improvements they sought from any installed, distributed sensors. Game design and experimenting through play proved useful, and as in eighteenth-century Enlightenment discourse, that these sessions were held in a coffee shop furthered thoughtful visioning and communication. The group's discursive design process resulted in a report, Fictions of a Smart Atlanta; its 13 scenarios included "Game Day Parking" (certain historically Black neighborhoods' occasional source of income) and "Sensor Maintenance," concerns as yet unperceived by City Hall. "These discussions confront racist and classist assumptions concerning who is considered to be an innovator or entrepreneur in the smart city and who is not."

DiSalvo addresses the picking of otherwise-wasted persimmons from trees on public land as a problem to be solved with Devices. The Concrete Jungle organization has foraged the fruit and given it to shelters and social service providers to distribute to their clients, but DiSalvo and crew thought technology might further help. Despite laws, logistics, and histories both encouraging and daunting, a system of sensors they called Fruit Are Heavy were created to sense when the pickings were ripe by how much its weight bent the branches. The fact that each non-networked device had to be read on site was a disadvantage. GIS data then helped produce a useful map called Fruit Are Here. Yet these results don't convey the richness of the projects' experience of "commoning" (creating a shared commons) and deeper questions raised by its process. DiSalvo reminds us in boldface text: "The Object Is Not the Subject of Design Experiments in Civics."

In the chapter "Institutions," DiSalvo tells of how a neighborhood initiative to report trash, overgrown lots, and rodent infestation code violations interfaced with the harried City of Atlanta Code Enforcement administrator. She enters their project called Careful Coding skeptically supportive, and in the process DiSalvo appreciates how institutions are essentially "rules of the game." Yet that's no reason that design experiments shouldn't endeavor to be pathways through them, spelunking their civic caverns.

DiSalvo draws upon a range of very relevant and germane scholarship on democracy, democratic processes, design histories, and political philosophy, to which I don't do justice in my cursory synopsis of this book.

The author draws upon several theoreticians to frame his design experiments as Events and Quasi-Events. This gives fresh perspective to the projects' expectations, collaborations, and frictions, the governing institutions and constituents, and the very act of making. Motivated by Isabelle Stengers's concept of the care of the possible, DiSalvo examines the ethics, results, and attainability of design experiments in democratic inquiry, completed and still possible. In the book's "Conclusion," he notes how the COVID-19 pandemic quashed some of the "Smart City" plans for Atlanta. While it may have delayed the more intrusive webs of surveillance, we can hope it opens up more opportunities for design with great citizen participation.

I read *Design as Democratic Inquiry* over a few days during a busy semester, often stealing a bit of time between making the rounds of easels as my classes drew or painted. My own experience trying to marry effective design process and democracy has been in the organizing and painting of community murals, practicing in California and now teaching in Michigan. This is not part of DiSalvo's experience, but I urge him to investigate the medium and interrogate its most community-rooted artists in Atlanta and elsewhere.

I have one quibble with the book, not with the author and content but with academic conventions. I imagine Carl DiSalvo as a compelling classroom lecturer, holding students' attention as he recounts these experiences and their contradictions, bringing his various neighborhood collaborators to life. Yet his text narratives are frequently punctuated with parenthetical citations (Moe, 2015; Larry and Curly, 2016; Shemp et. al 2017; Joe, 2018; Curly Joe, 2020) that interrupt our appreciation like caltrops to cavalry. Perhaps I'm spoiled by the simple clarity of a John Berger or George Orwell, but if my reading of this interesting book is sabotaged as I stumble over them, what does it do to the reading and comprehension by a contemporary student?

DICTIONARY OF UNTRANSLATABLES: A PHILOSOPHICAL LEXICON

by Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, U.S.A., 2014. 1,344 pp. ISBN: 978-0-69-113870-1.

Reviewed by Michael Punt.

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The *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, first published in 2014, is currently still available in hardback and other formats. It needs a presence because it is primarily a tool that is an almost essential component of any technical philosophical discussion. At 1,344 A4 pages it has an object quality that also meets its purpose for the non-philosopher as a reminder of what philosophy is really about and what basic assumptions we need to unravel

in almost any discussion of abstract concepts. The press release for the book describes it as

> an encyclopaedic dictionary of close to 400 important philosophical, literary, and political terms and concepts that defy easy—or any—translation from one language and culture to another. Drawn from more than a dozen languages, terms such as *Dasein* (German), *pravda* (Russian), *saudade* (Portuguese), and *stato* (Italian) are thoroughly examined in all their cross-linguistic and cross-cultural complexities. Spanning the classical, medieval, early modern, modern, and contemporary periods, these are terms that influence thinking across the humanities.

This describes it well, but even the glittering list of awards that it has attracted does not do the book full justice as an example of the sort of clear authoritative scholarship that the humanities need. Originally published in French, the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* is a massive and admirable undertaking by leading scholars and authorities to codify the possibly simultaneous meanings of the more technical terms that are essential—or seem essential—in philosophical writing. Many of these words are also used professionally by academics in the sciences, arts, and humanities in the sharing of ideas. But words such as "time", "imagination", "feeling", "people", "pathos", etc., it is claimed, are untranslatable. The entry for "History," for example, addresses the Dutch, German, Greek, Italian, and Latin words tracing the path of the idea through its various translations. Despite its widespread use, there is, of course, no definitive translation, because, as the various versions show, it is an untranslatable term requiring clear definition before it is used. Within the 10 pages used to follow this pathway of the concept of history through different languages there are a number of explanatory "boxes" in which cognate branches such as metahistory, historiography, etc. are laid out in clear, authoritative language.

In the process of its efforts to reveal the locus of a concept, there is an awareness of language as partial and subject to wear and tear. Hartog and Werner, who are responsible for this entry, open the translation with a question.

"The path from Greek *historia* to the French *histoire* . . . seems simple and direct. History was always history! One clue, however, should put us on our guard: why did the German end up distinguishing between *Historie* (a clear translation of the Latin *historia*) from *Geschichte* (referring to what has happened but also to the recounting we give of the study of the past—'History' with a capital H)?" (p. 439)

This discursive tactic runs through many entries as the contingencies of translation are revealed to have much wider effects on our understanding of ourselves. All this is done with the generosity and grace that often follows confident authority. The fundamental problem that the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* tackles rests most squarely in the domain of philosophy and the philosophy of translation, but that should not deter other readers. In the first place there is sublime pleasure to be gained from engaging with words for ideas in a raw and weightless state as their meanings are briefly freed from the gravitational pull of habitual language. There is also much to be said for the sheer joy and confidence of much of the writing in the book. Perhaps most of all in the context of the Leonardo project, its presence is a constant reminder that as we work across and between disciplines, we cannot assume that we are using the same terms to mean the same things.

The *Dictionary of Untranslatable*s is a clear and cathartic read that cleanses the palate after much of the fast food that is served up as theory. It is still available in hard copy and recommended as a valuable fixture on the desk and an important tool for us to rehearse our ways of thinking as well as a reminder that in dealing with complex topics there is a great pleasure to be had in being clear.

There are also a number of other reviews online including two especially helpful ones by Lucie Mercier (https://www.theoryculturesociety.org/blog/review-barbara-cassin-et-al-dictionary-of-untranslatables) and Michael Kinnucan (https://www.asymptotejournal.com/criticism/barbara-cassin-dictionary-of-untranslatables-a-philosophical-lexicon/).

EATING IN THEORY

by Annemarie Mol. Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2021. 208 pp. Trade, paper. ISBN: 978-1-4780-1037-1; ISBN: 978-1-4780-1141-5.

Reviewed by Hannah Drayson. Email: hannah.drayson@plymouth.ac.uk.

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In whatever form they take, eating and breathing are functional necessities of life. They engage human bodies in fundamental material