

Brett Whiteley's Words and Images: a translation studies approach

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses the tools of translation studies to analyse the relationship between words and images in the work of the Australian artist Brett Whiteley (1939-92), an aspect that to date has been largely overlooked. By examining the words contained in both his paintings and his writings (letters, notebooks and diaries), the verbal/visual synergy that underpins Whiteley's language is emphasised as a key aspect of his communicative appeal.

My investigation is an experimental procedure at the crossroads of Italian and comparative literature, art history, and visual culture. By employing think-aloud protocols, and in the light of William T. Mitchell's 'picture theory' (*Picture Theory*, 1994), I analyse Whiteley's works as 'imagetexts', namely, texts where words and images coexist and interact. This approach allows me to show how the translation process produces a critical interpretation of a work of art, opening a window on the interdisciplinary encounter between creative processes in the visual art and translation theory and practice.

The analysis focuses on Whiteley's interartistic, intermodal, and intertextual self-representation. In particular, I distinguish between Whiteley's self-representation in *praesentia*, namely, the way in which he would explicitly depict or describe himself, and his self-representation in *absentia*, that is, the way in which he would represent himself by resorting to alter egos or metonymies. In both cases, verbal and visual elements are related not only through the medium, but also via a series of intra- and extra-textual references, which draw attention to Whiteley's poetics of excess.

The aim of this enquiry is not so much to identify the parallelism between the words and the images as to explain how and why their relationship is an aspect inherent to Whiteley's self-representation. Since this self-representation is constructed by a blend of heterogeneous signs activating different channels, modes, and intellectual and emotional responses, Whiteley's self-depiction can be regarded as a composite phenomenon, which entails various media and stimulates multiple sensory and cognitive reactions.

KEYWORDS: Brett Whiteley, imagetext, interart, intermodality, intertextuality, Italian, self-representation, think-aloud protocols, verbal-visual.

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