Visualizing Spatialization at a Crossroads between Translation and Mobility: Italian Australian Artist Jon Cattapan's Cityscapes

Eliana Maestri

Introduction: The arts scene in multicultural Australia

Home to the Victorian College of the Arts and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne has trained generations of professional artists, especially since the implementation of Australian multiculturalism – initiated by the 1973 Immigration Minister Al Grassby, a member of the Labor Whitlam government.[1] The confluence between increasing interest in the arts, as ideal media for the multiplicity of voices in multi-ethnic Australia, and the impact of the Whitlam government's measures, inaugurating cultural liberalization, laid the groundwork for successful initiatives in the arts.[2] As Jennifer Craik also maintains, from 1968 Australia saw a '*rapid expansion* of arts and cultural organisations' and from 1975 a 'dynamic reform of cultural administration.'[3] Australians, including those from working-class, less affluent or disadvantaged communities,[4] were encouraged to enjoy the arts scene and, possibly, carve out a professional career in the arts and humanities. Young artists, born to migrant parents but raised in Australia during the transition from the 'White Australia' policy to the one of multiculturalism, were persuaded that they could 'engage confidently with global culture.'[5] Not only were they accorded unprecedented governmental support, they were also stimulated to explore the Australian art world as well as situate its artistic sensitivity within a wide-ranging web of transnational connections. As Jon Cattapan, a product of that time and the focus of this chapter, states: 'The sense of coming out of a

---

[1] Katherine Smits, 'Justifying Multiculturalism: Social Justice, Diversity and National Identity in Australia and New Zealand', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 46.1 (2011), pp. 87–103.
[2] Ien Ang and Greg Noble, 'Making Multiculture: Australia and the Ambivalent Politics of Diversity', in *Making Culture: Commercialisation, Transnationalism, and the State of 'Nationing' in Contemporary Australia*, ed. by David Rowe, Graeme Turner and Emma Waterton (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 140-53; Sandra Forbes, 'Government and the Arts in Australia', *World Literature Today*, 67.3, Contemporary Australian Literature (Summer 1993), pp. 494-98; Chris McAuliffe, *Jon Cattapan: Possible Histories* (Melbourne: Miegunyah, 2008), p. 24; Julian Meyrick, *Australian Theatre after the New Wave: Policy, Subsidy and the Alternative Artist* (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2017), pp. 1-5; Geoffrey Milne, *Theatre Australia (Un)limited: Australian Theatre Since the 1950s* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), p. 217; Eugene van Erven, *Community Theatre: Global Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 209.
[3] Jennifer Craik, *Re-Visioning Arts and Cultural Policy: Current Impasses and Future Directions* (Canberra: ANU E, 2007), p. 7, italics in original.
[4] Ang and Noble, 'Making Multiculture', pp. 141-42.
[5] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 24.

European orbit became important' and motivated him to leave Australia temporarily.[6] Artists, curators and art historians felt the need to travel to Europe and connect with their cultural and artistic roots.

In the seventies and eighties, young artists of Italian descent found themselves amidst cultural spaces and human energies, which pushed them even further to surf the globe and connect with their roots. Together with other young Italian Australians, these artists experienced what Cattapan called 'a generational shift, […] com[ing] out of their migrant background and […] find[ing] themselves being part of a new culture but attending to the old culture a little bit.'[7] Despite the fact that, in the majority of the cases, Italian families did not approve of their children's career in the creative arts sector – as they wanted them to become 'respectable' doctors or engineers –,[8] they implicitly increased their desire to leave for Europe and connect with 'that cultural lineage' located within their country of origin.[9] Because of their relentless attachment to their Italian heritage, first-generation Italians, settled in Australia before and/or after the Second World War, resisted assimilation and indirectly paved the way for Australian multiculturalism,[10] while arousing the curiosity of their offspring for Italy and the world beyond Australia. This curiosity complicates and enriches our understanding of the Italian diaspora to Australia and across the world. It, therefore, needs to be studied in a systematic and comprehensive way. This chapter intends to address this need and encourage future research on how second-generation Italians in Australia have been affected by migration and how they have articulated this legacy and 'layer into [their] thinking,'[11] with particular attention to the visual arts. A number of academic volumes and research projects have been devoted to the investigation of Italy *out of* Italy, namely a country constructed and reconstructed in oral and written discursive narratives of migration across times and spaces. A zone which remains unexplored is the visual, and, in particular, how visual artists of Italian descent reflect on the malleability of the Italian identity and culture through the production of artistic expressions displaying the main components of a

---

[6] Jon Cattapan, Unpublished Interview with Eliana Maestri (2014).

[7] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).

[8] Laura Hougaz, *Entrepreneurs in Family Business Dynasties: Stories of Italian-Australian Family Businesses Over 100 Years* (Cham: Springer, 2015), pp. v, 170.

[9] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).

[10] Stephen Castles, 'Italians in Australia: Building a Multicultural Society on the Pacific Rim', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies,* 1.1 (1991), pp. 45-66 (p. 64); Stephen Castles, 'Italians in Australia: The Impact of a Recent Migration on the Culture and Society of a Postcolonial Nation', in *The Columbus People*: *Perspectives in Italian Immigration to the Americas and Australia,* ed. by Lydio F. Tomasi, Piero Gastaldo and Thomas Row (New York: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, Centre for Migration Studies, 1994), pp. 342-67 (pp. 361-62).

[11] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).

transcultural and translingual nation in motion: mobility, language and space.[12]

How do Australian artists of Italian descent display their journeys across continents and imaginary lands? How do their travels to European and non-European destinations help them translate and visualize the transcultural discourses of their parents' country of origin, situated within a web of global connections? How do they interpret their hybrid identity, translate their multilayered life narratives into visual artworks and contribute to the problematization of Italian culture constantly redesigned by mobility, movement and migration? As 'roots are forms of narration […] providing routes through the world,'[13] how do they engage with cultural and linguistic constructs across borders while straddling manifold worlds? As they are also speakers of languages that are rooted to a place that is a translated space, how does their competence in the Italian language contribute to their visual translation and mediation of perceptions of Italy and other cultures? Being part of an inspiring multicultural makeup in Australia and the receptors of practices of migration and conservation of Italian traditions, these artists display thought-provoking translations of the Italian diaspora in a global context. Intrigued by Italian culture and un/familiar Italian spaces, the second and subsequent generations have performed the complex role of transnational and transcultural mediators.[14] Michael Cronin and Sherry Simon confirm: 'Mediators are involved in […] a range of activities which exceeds mere translation – they are multilingual authors, self-translators, often active in a variety of intercultural and inter-artistic networks, often migrants, with hybrid identities, who develop transfer activities in several geo-cultural spaces.'[15] Whereas the Italian Australian artists' transnational interests have led them to navigate worlds across continental borders and trace 'the dialectic between the local and the global,'[16] their transcultural position has helped them negotiate meaning specifically between Italian generations, spaces and languages.

A space-language approach to Cattapan's artwork

Owing to spatial constraints, I will seek to answer the questions above by discussing one

---

[12] An example is provided by Fred Gardaphé, 'In the Name of the Father and the Son: Italian Migrations in the Art of Joseph and William Papaleo', in *Harbors, Flows, and Migrations: The USA in/and the World*, ed. by Vincenzo Bavaro, Gianna Fusco, Serena Fusco and Donatella Izzo (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), pp. 487-509.

[13] Iain Chambers quoted in Rita Wilson, 'Cultural Mediation through Translingual Narrative', *Target*, 23.2 (2011), pp. 235-50 (p. 235).

[14] Eliana Maestri, 'Quale Europa? In Italia o in Australia? Percezioni e visioni europee degli italiani australiani di seconda e terza generazione', in *Cultura e costruzione del culturale: Fabbriche dei pensieri in Italia nel novecento e verso il terzo millennio*, ed. by Ilona Fried (Budapest: Ponte Alapítvány, 2014), pp. 263-98.

[15] Michael Cronin and Sherry Simon, 'Introduction: The City as a Translation Zone', *Translation Studies*, 7.2 (2014), pp. 119-32 (p. 123).

[16] Wilson, 'Cultural Mediation', p. 236.

second-generation Italian in Australia: Jon Cattapan, eminent Melbourne-based visual artist and current Director of the Victorian College of the Arts. Born to Italian parents in the fifties and raised at the dawn of multicultural Australia, Cattapan's development as a person and as an artist has capitalized on cultures, ethnicities, artistic practices and generations: 'My father used to say if you are a migrant you're always gonna sit with your bum on two chairs, you know? And it is an interesting way of thinking about it, you are always between two places a little bit.'[17] His living in-between and within multiple places and cultural affiliations makes his work highly autobiographical, mobile, hybridized and, almost by default, 'translational'. The translational 'describes the complex process of cultural signification produced under the impact of […] displacements, migrations, relocations and diasporas and the unprecedented development of transnational electronic communications and media systems.'[18] Practiced by an inhabitant of multiple cultures and languages, translation represents this artist's *modus operandi* providing him with methods, frames and processes of signification and negotiation as well as spatial figuration and linguistic representation. In light of the fact that translation appears as an integral component of his socio-cultural relations and artistic practices, how is this practice conceptualized in his visual artwork? This chapter will focus on the way Cattapan translates the interplay between spatial mobility, language practices and Italian identity into artistic spaces and how these spaces raise awareness of translation as a fundamental approach to the visualization of diasporic experiences.

I will avail myself of language-based theories of space and thick translation, which, although they do not seem to share common ground, prove to be useful in casting light on how Cattapan, as a visual artist with a migrant background and long-standing ties to multiple places, addresses questions of space and language. In other words, they will be useful in understanding how spaces and languages are conceptualized, visualized and translated into a layered and thick zone. In particular, I will draw on cultural theorist Henri Lefebvre's studies of space and cities,[19] which inaugurated the spatial turn in the Humanities in the seventies and are still key in understanding how language and space affect one another in today's society.[20]

---

[17] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[18] Wilson, 'Cultural Mediation', p. 236.
[19] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith, English 1st edn 1991 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, French 1st edn 1974/1984); Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, trans. by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).
[20] Harvey Molotch, 'The Space of Lefebvre', *Theory and Society*, 22.6 (1993), pp. 887-95; Ceri Watkins, 'Representations of Space, Spatial Practices and Spaces of Representation: An Application of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad', *Culture and Organization*, 11.3 (2005), pp. 209-20; Stuart Elden, 'There is a Politics of Space because Space is Political: Henri Lefebvre and the Production of Space', *Radical Philosophy Review*, 10.2 (2007), pp. 101-16; Jani Vuolteenaho et al., 'Language, Space, Power: Reflections on Linguistic and Spatial Turns in Urban Research', in *Language, Space and Power: Urban Entanglements*, ed. by Jani Vuolteenaho, Lieven Ameel, Andrew Newby and Maggie Scott, Studies across Disciplines in the

Despite the advancement of Lefebvre's theories, especially in the field of urban planning, geography and philosophy, Christina Higgins maintains that we still need to pay attention to his theories of space, in particular when migration is the focal point.[21] Lefebvre's conceptualizations of space as an interactive and multidimensional entity can contribute to the study of 'how spaces – including nation-states, but also spaces of language instruction and language use – are produced through the intersection of human activity, including the imagining of spaces as belonging to particular ethnicities, religions, genders, and languages.'[22] By accommodating the imagination of multiple spaces, the visual arts (including language-based ones) lend themselves to the study of spatialization and its translation into optical experiences. Lefebvre advocates the use of translation as a strategy to uncover the ideological layers involved in the construction and creation of space, but he does not suggest any practical application of it. Therefore, I will attempt to compensate for this theoretical gap by reverting to language-based theories of thick translation, which acknowledge and encourage the production of layered, or thick, texts in translation, namely translations dense with explanations about the textual strata of the original. Finally, a number of prominent Translation Studies scholars have looked at how acts of translation shape urban spaces and are affected by them.[23] None of them, however, invokes Lefebvre's theories of space or integrates them with recent translation theories. By benefitting from the confluence of theories of spatiality and translation, I therefore aim to enrich this promising field of research and pave the way for new and exciting methodological approaches to the study of the visualization of space, and in particular urban and migrant spaces.

Migrants and the city

If we look at Cattapan' artistic output to date, we can identify, almost immediately, a shared ground: the city and its architecture. Cronin and Simon confirm the migrants' attraction to the city as 'a space of productive diversity,'[24] and desire, as Lefebvre would also say. In his study on the impact of migration and globalization on urbanization, Lefebvre maintains that the city

---

Humanities and Social Sciences, 13 (Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, 2012), pp. 1-27.

[21] Christina Higgins, 'Space, Place, and Language', in *The Routledge Handbook of Migration and Language*, ed. by Suresh Canagarajah (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 102-16.

[22] Higgins, 'Space, Place, and Language', p. 102.

[23] Tong-King Lee, *Translating the Multilingual City: Cross-lingual Practices and Language Ideology* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013); Sherry Simon, *Cities in Translation: Intersections of Language and Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012); Sherry Simon, *Speaking Memory: How Translation Shapes City Life* (Montreal, Kingston, London and Chicago: McGill-Queen's University, 2016); Cronin and Simon, 'Introduction', pp. 119-32;

[24] Cronin and Simon, 'Introduction', p. 119.

represents a magnet with forces that pull on a number of citizens, including migrants.[25] While advocating diversity and centrality, these citizens claim the right to use and occupy the city and make it into their own space. Despite being theorized in the sixties, Lefebvre's reflections on the migrants' right to the city as a critical and productive site are still pertinent. For example, to demonstrate the relevance and application of Lefebvre's theories to today's society, Higgins maintains that racist slogans against Middle Eastern migrants bounced back and forth within Sydney's city centre in 2005 alienating recently arrived migrants, 'policing space and contesting different groups' rights to space.'[26] Despite the power of racist attitudes resisting new ideas about urban transformations to accommodate newcomers, migrants' contribution to the anatomy and morphology of the city proves to be inevitable and unavoidable. Cronin and Simon claim that 'mediators [among whom are migrants] are the true *architects* of common repertoires and frames of reference, e.g. a model of an urban, national or international culture.'[27] In addition, as 'a society is a space and an *architecture* of concepts,'[28] migrants contribute not only to the physical construction of cities and nations, but also to the conceptual creation of them.

Clear references to iconic urban landscapes, notoriously inhabited by multi-ethnic populations, have been part of Cattapan's practice throughout his long-standing professional career. His imaginary architectures, urban mappings and cityscapes (such as Melbourne, Rome, New York, Venice and Singapore) display uneasiness and restlessness. Fragmented and reassembled according to visual and acoustic principles, his cities reveal anxieties and the artist's sensitivity to their configuration. In the interview I conducted in 2014, he discusses 'the cityscape phase' as a significant turning point in his career. This moment, inaugurating the beginning of his growing attention paid to the city as a complex phenomenon, can be traced back to his 1985 seven-month visit to Castelfranco Veneto, a moment often recollected and documented in publications, interviews (including mine) and the statements he has made about his Melbourne exhibitions and cultural events worldwide. In Cattapan's work, urban landscapes and cityscapes are composite and layered territories so that 'people can claim their own.'[29] 'Layering', which 'has very much to do with the idea of the city,'[30] is a fabrication method, figurative device and semantic notion. It conceptualizes the artist's work and reveals transcultural and transnational approaches to the visual, similar to the techniques activated by cultural and linguistic translation as mediation.

---

[25] Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, p. 34.
[26] Higgins, 'Space, Place, and Language', p. 119.
[27] Cronin and Simon, 'Introduction', p. 123, my italics.
[28] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 139, my italics.
[29] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[30] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).

Movement and travel between places: Cattapan's Italy

Mobility and movement between urban places and spaces, spaces conflated into multifarious, transnational cities, represent Cattapan's signature trait. In order to illustrate this, I have to discuss Cattapan's artistic practices before and after his New York residency. He states:

This [that sense of layering] came out after a period of living in New York. […] I had this idea, very simple idea, that the expressive stuff which was underneath my work […] had become completely abstracted, and had a vague landscape sense, and then over the top of that I could drop […] this architectural, this cityscape which looked a little bit like pixilation.[31]

Cattapan's 'cityscape phase', started, as stated above, during the artist's visit to his Italian place of origin, was then refined during his travels, study tours and arts residencies in various parts of the world, including New York (1989-91), Canberra (1992), Venice (2007 and 2014), and Rome (2014).[32] Just before embarking for New York, Cattapan completed his *Documentary: Melbourne as Rome*,[33] which represents an attempt to reflect on his everlasting bond with Italian culture and the composite nature of urban morphology.[34] Unlike the paintings produced after his New York period, based on layering techniques and digital juxtapositions of images of transnational architectural elements onto international urban landscapes (a technique refined, as we shall see, later in his life), this one is 'only' a metaphorical superimposition of two cities: Melbourne and Rome, namely not just Melbourne in isolation but a surreal evocation of Rome.[35] Here, the allegorical and figurative charges are particularly meaningful, because they attribute spatial and translational traits to this piece of work. As Lefebvre claims, metaphors belong to the realm of space, because they reveal both '*fascination* […] with a natural space that has been lost and/or rediscovered' and 'displacement, and hence also transposition and transfer.'[36] The entire painting is indeed layered with acts of displacement and transfer (from Melbourne to New York and back), which are also fundamental attributes of the translation process. Loredana Polezzi reminds us that 'the connection between translation and mobility is often traced back to the etymological roots, the Latin word *translatio* indicating the movement or transfer of objects and people across space.'[37]

---

[31] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).

[32] Jon Cattapan, 'Jon Cattapan Biography', *Jon Cattapan* [online], <http://www.joncattapan.com.au> [accessed 4 December 2019].

[33] Jon Cattapan, *Documentary: Melbourne as Rome*, 1989, oil on linen, 210 x 183 cm, private collection, from McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 94.

[34] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 99.

[35] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 90.

[36] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 140, italics in original.

[37] Loredana Polezzi, 'Mobility', in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. by Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha, 2nd edn 2009 (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 172-78 (p. 172).

Cattapan visited Rome on various occasions, and the realization of *Documentary: Melbourne as Rome* was inspired by his passion for metropolitan centres and cinema.[38] In this work, neither Melbourne nor Rome has distinct or specific traits, but the fluidity of colour, the intensity of the blue and the multiplicity of shadows and spotlights create spatial points of contact between the background and the foreground, the general and the particular, as well as the Australian city and the Italian capital. This anaphoric reminiscence becomes a visual and kinaesthetic way to be in two places simultaneously, evoking transnational movement and mobility – the quintessential elements of migration – and shortening the distance between desired lands. As art historian Chris McAuliffe also claims, 'contrary to its title, *Documentary: Melbourne as Rome*, 1989, sets aside location and fact. It is not an image of Melbourne but a registration of the artist's longing for another place: the kind of city seen in *Roma* (1972), Fellini's genre-busting combination of memoir, documentary and allegory.'[39] The figurative evocation of Rome translates the artist's longing for a space to belong and projects his imagination into a transnational locus, conjuring another diasporic experience in his life. In Cronin and Simon's words, one could maintain that *Documentary: Melbourne as Rome* also 'reveal[s] the passages created among communities,'[40] framing diasporic routes and language encounters with the other.

Rome is not the only Italian attraction. At the beginning of my interview, Cattapan states that visiting the Veneto region and studying major Renaissance artists (such as Giorgione) elicited in him a 'pronounced response to Italian art'[41] and encouraged him to use the city of Melbourne as the ideal setting of his work, with, however, clear Italian reminiscences. These reminiscences bring back to life not only Rome but also Venice:

And it is with me to this day that the idea of Melbourne, which is my city, is somehow deeply ingrained in the work I make, comes out of that moment and takes me all the way back to Venice, which if I had the opportunity to live between Melbourne and Venice that is probably what I would do.[42]

Venetian tropes, and, in particular, fluidity, 'masking' (another way of creating layers) and the 'ultramarine blue,'[43] appear to be incorporated into depictions of Cattapan's Melbourne (see, for instance, *The Melbourne Panels*).[44] And this complex layering of brushstrokes and

---

[38] Chris McAuliffe, *The Drowned World: Jon Cattapan, Works and Collaborations* (Melbourne: Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, 2006), p. 13.
[39] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 90.
[40] Cronin and Simon, 'Introduction', p. 119.
[41] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[42] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[43] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[44] Jon Cattapan, *The Melbourne Panels*, 2003, oil on linen, three panels 185 x 168cm each, from Cattapan, 'Works', *Jon Cattapan* [online], <http://www.joncattapan.com.au> [accessed

tropes (further studied during his 2014 Printmaking residency, Bulgari Art Award, at the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica, Venice)[45] adds an extra dimension to the artist's translational practice paying tribute to his origins and fictional sources. McAuliffe skilfully identifies Italian writer Italo Calvino's influence on Cattapan's work: 'Calvino again showed the way when his narrator, Marco Polo, declared: "Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice … To distinguish the other cities' qualities, I must speak first of a city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice".'[46] Cattapan's spatial practice underpins his creative work, whilst also pointing up his desire to move fluidly between global and local realities as well as fictionalized and construed locations.

The linguistic construction of space and Cattapan's spatial inscriptions

Movement and travel across boundaries and cultures – including the Italian one – characterize other pieces of work produced by Cattapan in the following decades, namely after *Documentary: Melbourne as Rome*. The movement is produced by the evocation of multiple cities at once. Cattapan corroborates:

It is not one city. It is a cut-and-paste job. There is a little bit of Sydney, a bit of New York, a bit of London, a bit of Singapore. It creates this kind of composite city, if you like. That was a way of talking about the city as a global phenomenon at a conceptual level.[47]

In particular, his *Under New York* (1990) installation, assembled in New York, and *The City Submerged* (1991-ongoing) cycle of works, which he started during his residency at the Australia Council's Greene Street Studio, New York, and which he further evolved back in Australia,[48] are emblematic of this kinaesthetic mood. In New York, Cattapan refines the layering technique devised previously and his understanding of space. Here, Calvino's *Invisible Cities* represents a source of inspiration and 'poetic frame' for the artist.[49] The novel provides the artist with the tools to reflect not only on the multifarious urban configurations evolving into infinite and intertextual layers of subsequent and contiguous cities, but also on the constructed nature of the metropolitan space. McAuliffe's book-length study of Cattapan's aesthetics does not mention this element, which is supplanted by observations on the vagueness and evanescence of the displayed cities. According to McAuliffe's analysis, almost all the work completed in the 1990s and after 2000 displays cities that are less and less

---

4 December 2019].

[45] Cattapan, 'Jon Cattapan Biography', *Jon Cattapan* [online], <http://www.joncattapan.com.au> [accessed 4 December 2019]; Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).

[46] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 109.

[47] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).

[48] Jon Cattapan, Email to Eliana Maestri (22 October 2018).

[49] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 106.

localized and identifiable.[50] They challenge viewers' visual and sensory perceptions, especially as various transcultural urban landscapes are blended together. However, I believe that an in-depth linguistic-oriented analysis of the artificiality of these cities, in light of Lefebvre's theories of space, will help us unveil other intrinsic connections between the artist's migrant background, his visual constructions and his transnational/translational vision of the world.

Lefebvre worked on the production and construction of space and 'the dialectical relationship which exists within the triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived.'[51] In particular, he emphasizes the linguistic fabrication of space and the interrelation between social practices and the textualization of space by using language-inflected terminology and metaphors. Spaces are marked by signs produced and used by individuals within and around specific spaces.[52] Spaces are, therefore, not simple containers of signs. They are appropriated, manipulated, inscribed and designed by them: 'Conceptions of space tend […] towards a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs.'[53] Signs can be verbal as well as non-verbal, including languages created by communities within specific linguistic landscapes. In other words, language, one of the greatest human productions, partakes in the social practices shaping human relations actualized in space and fashioning perceptions and consumptions of space, which is revealed to be as real and factual as well as artificial and simulated.

Space, invested with spatial inscriptions and other language practices and discourses on space, is, consequentially, a huge, complex and multilayered text governed by ideologies and 'susceptible of coding and decoding.'[54] In his chapter 'Walking in the City', for example, de Certeau, deeply affected by the study of the language-space interplay, describes the view of the whole of New York City from the top of the World Trade Centre as an intricate fabric of words and letters: 'The tallest letters in the world compose a gigantic rhetoric of excess in both expenditure and production.'[55] Looking at the language-space interface entails not only the acquisition of spatial reading skills but also the identification of 'spatial *textures* which are informed by effective knowledge and ideology.'[56] In this light, cities and urban environments, with a high concentration of dwellers, are actually 'city-texts' or textual cities spreading across vast linguistic landscapes.[57]

---

[50] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 138; McAuliffe, *The Drowned World*, p. 5.
[51] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 39.
[52] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 140-41.
[53] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 39.
[54] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 141.
[55] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif., and London: University of California, 1984), p. 91.
[56] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 42, italics in original.
[57] Jani Vuolteenaho et al., 'Language, Space and Power', p. 10.

Cattapan's iconic cities (especially the ones visualized after his New York residency) are all textually produced landscapes traversed and inscribed by dots. His *Untitled* (1990) [INSERT FIG1 HERE] piece of work, belonging to the *Under New York* installation (presented in 1990 at the Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York) and also *Travel Suite*, a more recent collection (1990–2015) illustrating 'the beautiful ability of drawing to act like a visual travel diary,'[58] is emblematic. This painting, like others in the above collections, strikes us as being full of dots, in different numbers, shapes or forms. Whereas in McAuliffe's reading of Cattapan's artwork, these dots *are* data, namely synecdoches standing for the whole and being metonymically part of entire systems of data,[59] in my analysis they are signs and symbols *translating* data, namely information, numbers, files, facts, figures, digits and statistics produced and processed by information systems and digital technologies. Therefore, whereas for McAuliffe, 'a dab of paint is a pixel, which in turns calls to mind the vast realm of information technology'[60] and also 'pixilated streams of data' or 'dense webs of data flow,'[61] for me a dab of paint is a signifier, and – as I shall discuss this further below – a form of language, including the verbal one. In other words, looking at these dots as symbols and translations helps us consider in depth the translational, semiotic and constructed nature of these signs, codifying meanings and messages, and, especially, the interaction between semiotic systems, languages and spaces.

In addition, the 'dots' that Cattapan talks about, both in the interviews included in McAuliffe's 2008 monograph and in my 2014 interview, mark a shift in the artist's visual rhetoric over time. Works produced in New York and Canberra, for instance, are dominated by streams of lights whose dots reflect the haziness typical of luminescent particles emanated out of office windows by such electronic devices as computers, laptops, screens, mobile phones and other forms of digital communication and data transmission.[62] In the artist's latest works, the dots sometimes lose the electric brightness typical of light bulbs, computer screens or dashboards and acquire circularity, which emblematizes such icon-driven technologies as Androids, iOS home screens or, even, control panels from decades ago. Occasionally, these dots turn into unsophisticated symbols and simple signs, which, according to primitive iconicity, resemble rounded bodies and circle-shaped referents and signifiers (see, for example, the *Atonal Group* (Canareggio) series produced during the 2014 Venice Printmaking residency or other works on the city such as *Days of the Festival*).[63] By

---

[58] Cattapan, Email to Maestri (22 October 2018).
[59] Cattapan quoted in McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 149.
[60] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 149.
[61] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, pp. 123, 177.
[62] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, pp. 110, 123.
[63] An example is Jon Cattapan, *Atonal Group* (Cannaregio 7), 2014, mixed media on paper, 130 x130 cm, from Cattapan, 'Works', *Jon Cattapan* [online],

borrowing Mondrian's words, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen explain the simplicity that our scientific world tends to attribute to elementary geometrical characters such as 'circles': 'Circles […] have been regarded as pure, quasi-scientific "atoms" of the visible world, a "pure manifestation of the elements". […] And they have been thought to have the power to directly affect our nervous system.'[64] Not accidentally, Cattapan also defines his dots or circles as 'pulses,'[65] namely heartbeats, throbs, rhythms, vibrations and palpitations inducing human contact and visually translating basic forms of signification, writing and communication. Kress and van Leeuwen elucidate:

Circles and curved forms generally are the elements we associate with an organic and natural order, with the world of organic nature […]. Angularity we associate with the inorganic, crystalline world, or with the world of technology, which is a world we have made ourselves.[66]

In light of this, Cattapan's dotting technique is a strategy to visualize not only technologically transmitted data, but also natural or primeval forms of communication, which attempt to mirror the unsophisticated simplicity of verbal interaction devoid of scientific, specialized or technical devices mediating and complicating interaction.

The confluence of various types of visual signs, icons and codes, including the linguistic one, is diachronically exemplified by *The Bookbuilder* (1992) [INSERT FIG2 HERE]. In my reading of McAuliffe's analysis, *The Bookbuilder* represents a significant turning point, marking the start of Cattapan's 'datascape phase.'[67] Referring to this piece of work, Cattapan confirmed that 'as soon as I saw it, I thought, "I know what to do now – it fed me for a very, very long time".'[68] In *The Bookbuilder*, the information and communication systems invading the global city are represented by both heaps of books, namely the foundation, structure and scaffolding of 'a medieval building', and 'myriad lights, pinpricks of information, each light seeming to tell a story.'[69] The painting is accompanied by two vignettes complementing the work and visualizing the fact that in the past buildings were

<http://www.joncattapan.com.au> [accessed 4 December 2019]; Jon Cattapan, *Days of the Festivals*, 2007, oil on linen, 168 x 195 cm, from Cattapan, 'Works', *Jon Cattapan* [online], <http://www.joncattapan.com.au> [accessed 4 December 2019].
[64] Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 2nd edn 2006 (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 53.
[65] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[66] Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, p. 55.
[67] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, pp. 136-46.
[68] Paul Dalgarno, 'Jon Cattapan: A Portrait of the Artist as a New Director', *ART150: Celebrating 150 years of art* [online], <http://art150unimelb.edu.ac> [accessed 18 November 2018].
[69] Cattapan in McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 146.

made 'from books instead of bricks. Each book is like a dot,'[70] and, therefore, of written signs and verbal language. Nowadays, however, other forms of communication, including electronic and digital transmission of data, further complicate the shaping of urban spaces. Dots and circles, scattered across the canvas and marking harmoniously innumerable points of contact between two superimposed cities, Melbourne and New York,[71] merge skilfully forms of communication developed chronologically across centuries: the verbal and digital ones. These languages translate and convert information into meaningful symbols, electronically managed, filed and distributed across/around these two major urban centres. In light of this, these linguistic codes and symbols represent visual layers, or, better, 'narrative layers,'[72] which do not simply coat pre-existing fragmented layers of the artist's textual cities. These codes are 'deeply embedded'[73] into the painted space: they are part and parcel of the city-texts and, as a consequence, of the articulation of their urban morphology, syntagmatic relations and social-spatial practices: 'They [the words] also tell stories of local environment.'[74] In explaining the textual layers located in Sydney, Pennycook and Otsuji illustrate the same nexus between space, action and languages as the one found in Cattapan's work: 'Layers are not about the mere overlapping of texts on flat surfaces; rather, they need to be seen in terms of sedimented activities and practices that are still in motion.'[75]

Actions overwrite the city with textual messages, and the city responds by emitting messages. As Lefebvre maintains:

The city was and remains *object*, but not in the way of particular, pliable and instrumental object: such as a pencil or a sheet of paper. Its objectivity, or "objectality", might rather be closer to that of the *language* which individuals and groups receive before modifying it, or […] to that of a cultural reality, such as the *written book*. […] On this book, with this writing, are projected mental and social forms and structures. […] The city *writes* and *assigns*, that is, it signifies, orders, stipulates. What? That is to be discovered by reflection.[76]

Languages are cities and cities are languages which construct houses, buildings, bridges and skyscrapers and, in doing so, they orient and disorient the citizen or the traveller whose itineraries spread among meanders of letters, words, texts and text messages and whose goal is to discover what the city has to offer and communicate.

---

[70] Cattapan in McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 146.
[71] Cattapan in McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 146.
[72] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[73] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[74] Christine Dauber, 'An Interview with Jon Cattapan', *M/C: A Journal of Media and Culture*, 5.3 (2002) [online], <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0207/cattapaninterview.php> [accessed 18 November 2018].
[75] Alastair Pennycook and Emi Otsuji, *Metrolingualism: Language in the City* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 139.
[76] Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, p. 102.

Cattapan as a multimodal and multilingual migrant artist

I conclude that Cattapan's visualization of metropolitan sites is a way to draw fictitious, translational trajectories between imaginary and real cities and express his desire to be in multiple spaces and places at the same time. Cattapan's paintings are also a way to embark upon imaginary journeys out of Australia and back to European, American or Asian cities, without abandoning or ignoring – as discussed above – his Italian origins but unveiling and empowering them. Finally, his paintings are playful attempts to reflect on the confluence of signs and languages that surround and write our lives. Second-generation migrants are renowned for their tentative competences in the second language,[77] sensitivity to other cultures and desire to bring them to life in computer-mediated spaces, i.e. WhatsApp and text messages with Italian relatives and friends based in the country of origin.[78] Languages are seen by Cattapan as a 'grid,'[79] a grid that prevents the viewer from seeing things and entering his depicted spaces. These grids, visualized in his work (for example in *Exhibition Group Study*),[80] could be interpreted as distant and unreceptive, especially when they translate languages that are not mastered completely or practiced daily. But my 2014 interview with Cattapan also reveals that the latter sees languages as a way to feel at home in a country[81] as well as social practices at work in urban settings and, simultaneously, at one with them: 'All [the dots are] […] deeply embedded there.'[82] These practices cannot be disengaged from the internet, which dominates our era and influences our language-space behaviour.[83]

Melbourne-based writer and curator Kyle Weise analyses the professional use of computer-assisted techniques in Cattapan's artistic production but he overlooks the artist's migrant background, translational activities and interaction with the computer-modulated languages in/of the city. In his review of Cattapan's digital methods of data visualization, Weise sees Cattapan's pixel-style dots as 'networks and relationships that entangle us' or as 'networks of communication and media that dominate our landscape.'[84] Emphasis is placed

---

[77] Antonia Rubino, *Trilingual Talk in Sicilian-Australian Migrant Families: Playing out Identities Through Language Alternation* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[78] Antonia Rubino, 'Italian in Australia: Past and New Trends', *Innovation in Italian Teaching* (Brisbane: Griffith University, 2002), pp. 1-15 (p. 9).

[79] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).

[80] Jon Cattapan, *Exhibition Group Study*, 2012, Archival inkjet print with acrylic and pencil markings, ED 5, each unique 60 x 80 (image size), from Cattapan, 'Works', *Jon Cattapan* [online], <http://www.joncattapan.com.au> [accessed 4 December 2019].

[81] This is exemplified by the joy of discovering that 'Catapan' is also the name of a Venetian alley (Cattapan, Interview with Maestri, 2014).

[82] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).

[83] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).

[84] Kyle Weise, 'Jon Cattapan: Data-scapes', *Eyeline: Contemporary Visual Arts*, 78/79 (2015), pp. 42-49 (p. 42)

more on the 'ephemerality and intangibility of the digital realm'[85] than on the linguistic fabrication of the city. Data and cities are seen as two separate entities (the latter suffering the consequences of the former) rather than a confluence of forces and social practices (including verbal communication) generated by and generating specific spaces. Furthermore, there is no mention of the implied viewers – multilingual, multi-ethnic and multi-skilled – populating global and cosmopolitan urban centres. Cattapan's artwork, made in the heart of cosmopolitan cities with their mobile population of migrants and travellers, invites the viewer to unpack the layers that the city has acquired over time: its resemblance to other cities, its acoustic cacophony, the changing face of its signposted buildings and its textual and spatial co-creation at the hands of multilingual speakers and users of different electronic and digital devices.

Like Weise, McAuliffe neglects the interplay between multimodality and migration in Cattapan's artwork. He recognizes the artist's attempt to depict the mobility and fluidity of metropolitan sites, concepts that Cattapan draws from postmodern and poststructuralist philosophers including Zygmunt Bauman, Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.[86] Furthermore, McAuliffe repeatedly stresses the artist's intention to represent the flow of data, 'information, people and capital,'[87] and the ensuing mobile qualities that the global city acquires. According to him, modern cities attract the artist because of their nomadic and mobile traits (defining the condition of urban postmodernism), not because of their migratory history or background – an aspect that is not discussed by this art historian.[88] The adjective 'migrant', along with its problematic and politically loaded connotations grounded in reality, is never employed by McAuliffe. It is supplanted instead by such cosmopolitan, trendy and, at times, abstract terms as 'mobile', 'fluid' or 'bohemian', terms which convey, as he claims, a postmodern sense of elusiveness, evasiveness, uncertainty, instability and slippage.[89] As a consequence, in his view, the postmodern society depicted by Cattapan is 'a "post-industrial society", a "consumer society, media society, information society, electronic society",'[90] but not a migratory society. Migration is, however, celebrated by the inclusivity that marks the artist's collection *Travel Suite*. While bringing together artworks from various residencies and travels (New York, India, Korea, etc…), *Travel Suite* 'lets the individual works migrate' and hails 'travel sensations, especially

---

[85] Weise, 'Jon Cattapan', p. 43.

[86] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, pp. 100, 138, 141, 149.

[87] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 149.

[88] Only Karen Burns mentions this briefly in a conversation with Cattapan, transcribed and included in McAuliffe, *The Drowned World*, p. 14.

[89] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, pp. 100, 141.

[90] Jameson quoted in McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 141.

colour.'[91]

In addition, McAuliffe claims that Cattapan's art is a way to portray the 'mutation [of the city] in the digital age,'[92] its apocalyptic fate or its evanescent and transient nature, aspects also explained by the artist in various online interviews and talks. However, despite the fact that he briefly mentions Cattapan's migrant background,[93] he does not reflect at any length on how the artist's position, as a member of a multimodal and polylingual community, shapes his artistic practice, aesthetics and world vision. Cattapan's migrant roots are not discussed alongside the multimodal or semiological nature of his artwork.[94] Moreover, McAuliffe never refers to Cattapan as Italian Australian or second-generation Italian, but simply Australian, shadowing his ability to inhabit multiple spaces and linguistically varied communities, including the Italian one. This aspect in fact emerges considerably during my 2014 interview, which confirms the importance that Cattapan confers to his upbringing 'out of a migrant background' and within 'the large Veneto community in Melbourne'. Knowing that 'there is a network of people coming out of the same culture […] [and providing] another cultural layer into your thinking' appears to be fundamental in Cattapan's reflections on his identity formation and artistic development.[95] These layers are not easy to disentangle or articulate, because, as Cattapan maintains, are subconscious and in-built: 'It is an intuitive thing. You let it wash over you and it is there.'[96] These layers are therefore part of the artist's identity as a second-generation Italian and a lens through which he sees Melbourne, the world and human relations, relations mediated by languages and codified signs.

Cattapan's acts of translation

As Lefebvre proposes: 'If I compare the city to a book, to a writing (a semiological system), I do not have the right to forget the aspect of mediation. I can separate it neither from what it contains nor from what contains it, by isolating it as a complete system.'[97] Being mindful of mediation means that we must not forget that the painting is a medium or that second-generation Italian Australians are transcultural mediators. However, it also means that the city-book is a construction and modulation. In light of this, we should investigate how acts of mediation, transmission, alteration and, therefore, translation of semantic practices, fashioning the urban space and fabricating the urban text, are performed. In order to do so,

[91] Cattapan, Email to Maestri (22 October 2018).
[92] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 113.
[93] McAuliffe, Cattapan, pp. 21, 171.
[94] Only *Carrying*, a piece of work about refugees in Australia, is discussed in light of Cattapan's migratory background, but not in relation to his digital art practice (Jon Cattapan, *Carrying*, 2002, oil on linen, 195 x 240 cm, from McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, pp. 170-71).
[95] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[96] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[97] Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, p. 102.

Lefebvre suggests a number of 'intellectual operations and reflective approaches' among which 'translation.'[98] Translation is a method to 'decipher' urban reality, replicate its fabrication mechanisms and analyse inscriptions and projections of relations and processes onto the city-book. According to this theorist, translation can unearth what is not immediately visible, palpable, transparent, evident or noticeable on the semiological surface of the city.[99] The city writes and is overwritten by a multiplicity of acts and city-languages complicating its landscape and architecture: 'Both natural and urban spaces are, if anything, "over-inscribed": everything therein resembles a rough draft, jumbled and self-contradictory.'[100] Confusion climaxes multiple times, for example when 'the specific code of the urban is an incomprehensible modulation, a version, a translation without the original or origins.'[101] Translation represents the key to understanding the opacity of reality and its layers. As Lefebvre explains: 'The whole is not immediately present in this written text, the city. There are other levels of reality which do not become *transparent* by definition.'[102] These levels or layers are the outcomes of transcriptions performed by the hand of ideological and social-spatial practices of interaction.

So, how can translation help us unearth what is not immediate or obvious? What kind of translation practices does Cattapan apply to his work? What kind of acts of translation does his work display? Cattapan's paintings are all produced under the sign of translation and this is obvious through his ability to depict not only flows of people and capital, but also digital transmissions of data bytes and movements of information, which are translational by definition (see, for example, *Study After Endless* (Melbourne), 2014 [INSERT FIG3 HERE]). As Michael Cronin confirms:

The variability of outputs of these machines [laptops] is made possible, in part by the universal convertibility of binary code, the ability of words, images, sounds to be converted to the universal language of code. In this sense, the radical changes that have been wrought in all areas of life as a result of the advent of information technology are to be placed under the sign of convertibility or *translation*.[103]

During 2004 and 2006 interviews, with Christine Dauber and Julie Copeland respectively, Cattapan articulates his strategies of data visualization by illustrating his computerized devices, software (i.e. Adobe Photoshop) and 'translation' approaches.[104] On

---

[98] Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, p. 102.
[99] Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, pp. 102-03, 107-08.
[100] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 142.
[101] Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, p. 108.
[102] Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, p. 102.
[103] Michael Cronin, *Translation in the Digital Age* (London and New York, 2013), p. 3, my italics.
[104] 2004 interview with Dauber in McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 138; 2006 interview with

both occasions, Cattapan explains that the latest paintings of his 'datascape' phase (since his 1992 work in Canberra) have been produced by actualizing processes of translation, namely renditions of 'visual image[s] back into painting.'[105] In order to do so, cityscapes are scanned and superimposed digitally and then 'marked' or 'translated' manually by the painter:

The beautiful thing about it is that you start off with something which is captured … literally the information is captured digitally, but in *translation* it becomes very much about a unique kind of mark making. So although I may be trying to replicate at times the look of the pixel or of a digital screen … when you're actually right in front of the work … you become aware of the fact that there's texture, that there's clumsiness, that there are particular kinds of marks that are in my … painterly handwriting.[106]

The painter's manual marks aim to replicate the pixel-style dots and, therefore, all the signs, codes and languages that populate the cityscape at hand. In light of this, translation should not just be seen as remediation, namely a conversion of visual images into digital ones, highlighted for instance by Weise.[107] It should be seen as 'thick' translation, namely a 'productive' strategy that aims to translate a text by thickening its fabric with personal input and subjective interpretations:[108] 'The hand-made mark becomes highly subjective as an interpretative tool, and therefore much as I might try to simply replicate the collage, what results is a painterly colouration and discrete mark-making process of overlays that speaks about painting itself.'[109]

Processes of thick translation, initially theorized by Appiah and then refined by Hermans, Wolf, Cheung and Boyle,[110] have been hailed for their ability to do justice to the multilayered complexity of texts in translation. These scholars consider interlinguistic translation, as transfer from language A to language B, one-dimensional and limiting. Since texts are multilayered and polyphonic objects intrinsically embedded in their cultural and

---

Copeland in McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 195.

[105] Cattapan quoted in McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 195.

[106] Cattapan quoted in McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 195, my italics.

[107] Weise, 'Jon Cattapan', p. 44.

[108] Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Thick Translation', *Callaloo,* Post-Colonial Discourse: A Special Issue, 16.4 (1993), pp. 808-19 (p. 817).

[109] Cattapan quoted in McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 138.

[110] Appiah, 'Thick Translation', pp. 808-19; Theo Hermans, 'Cross-Cultural Translation Studies as Thick Translation', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London,* 66.3 (2003), pp. 380-89; Michaela Wolf, 'Feminist Thick Translation: A Challenge to the Formation of Feminist Cultural Identity?', *Tradução e Comunicação*, 12 (May 2003), pp. 115-31; Martha P.Y. Cheung, 'On Thick Translation as a Mode of Cultural Representation', in *Across Boundaries: International Perspective on Translation Studies*, ed. by Dorothy Kenny and Kyongjoo Ryou, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 22-36; Catherine Boyle, 'On Mining Performance: Marginality, Memory and Cultural Translation in the Extreme', in *Differences on Stage,* ed. by Alessandra De Martino, Paolo Puppa and Paola Toninato (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 207-23.

linguistic setting,[111] translation processes ought to contemplate experimental and multidimensional ways to render their thickness, texture and fabric. As a possible solution to the subjective interpretation and rendition of the textual complexity in translation, annotations and glosses,[112] paratextual prefaces and footnotes,[113] explications and digressions[114] should be visibly added to the translated text. If on the one hand, this 'extra-textual apparatus distances the reader from the narrative,' on the other hand it enhances the translational nature of the text and raises awareness of the subjective agency of the translator.[115] Cattapan's marks and dots enrich his texts-objects-translations of multiple cities or cities in motion by incorporating inscriptions and writings which, while highlighting the constructed nature of the painting (as Cattapan says), gloss up the painting, annotating the mechanisms that participate in the transformation of the global city: the polygonal conjunction of artificial urban-inflected sign systems.

Why is it important to understand Cattapan's approach, which here I define as thick translation? What insight can this appreciation offer into the work of this artist, as a second-generation Italian Australian? And, finally, what ideologies and power does his work uncover and denounce? Cattapan's urban narrative phase coincides with his attempt to explore the dangers and the anxieties amplified by globalization. The artist reminds us that globalization and the ensuing circulation of money, objects and people that it generates increase endless replication mechanisms across the world.[116] The solipsistic repetition, reproduction and exportation of elements, features and characters across borders (also facilitated by mobility and technology) lead to standardization practices, uniformity and, consequently, as the artist claims, fear of sameness and identity crisis.[117] These fears and crises are projected onto Cattapan's implied viewers, identified with travellers, travellers looking at cityscapes and topographical similarities from an airplane widow,[118] and, according to my interpretation of the artist's work, with second-generation migrants. In the words of Cronin, 'travellers go to far-off places, tell their readers that the "exotic" is an illusion, that everywhere has now become much the same and the writers themselves are the last witnesses of differences which are about to disappear forever.'[119] Second-generation migrants share the same worries and uncertainties as the ones felt by global travellers, but they personalize and internalize them

---

[111] Appiah, 'Thick Translation', p. 817.
[112] Appiah, 'Thick Translation', p. 817.
[113] Wolf, 'Feminist Thick Translation', p. 121.
[114] Hermans, 'Translation Studies as Thick Translation', p. 387.
[115] Wolf, 'Feminist Thick Translation', pp. 121, 125.
[116] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 123.
[117] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, pp. 106, 123; Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[118] McAuliffe, *Cattapan*, p. 141
[119] Michael Cronin, 'Speech Acts: Language, Mobility, and Place', in *Travel and Ethics: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Corinne Fowler, Charles Forsdick and Ludmilla Kostova (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 16-30 (p. 21).

further. Current second-generation migrants in Australia, for example, fear sameness *in situ*: they dread losing their ethnic traits and being absorbed into an undistinguishable and anonymous blotch.[120] Being the children of first-generation migrants to pre-multicultural Australia, they have experienced the brutalities and racism of the 'White Australia' policy and have struggled to comply with assimilation requirements devoid of any form of respect for other cultural heritages than the White British one. 'If you were Italian, you were the other', Cattapan confirms.[121]

Therefore, Cattapan's layered cities, produced through digital superimpositions of scanned images of urban landscapes, translate cities into cities into cities ad infinitum and highlight their ethnic strata and semiotic complexity. To borrow Simon's words, his cities are 'a crossroad of codes […] where there is a heightened awareness of the plurality of meaning systems, of the testing of the limits of expression, where dissonance is understood as a productive force.'[122] The different dotting pattern that characterizes every image of Cattapan's cities marks the original contribution of the artist as second-generation migrant to the depicted landscape and, at the same time, their uniqueness and linguistic specificity, unlike what McAuliffe advocates.[123] Despite being dystopian (and, consequently, intrinsically diasporic), they are not 'any' city displaying the same traits and features as any global city in the world. The layers and strata, contributing to their unique con/fusion and setup, visualize their resistance to ideological processes of assimilation, domestication and blending, implemented by the White Australia policy before the seventies and encouraged by standardizing processes of globalization after that. According to Cronin, globalization has activated two global translation mechanisms: translational assimilation and translational accommodation.[124] Whilst the former forces migrants to adjust to their new language environment by translating themselves into their cultural surrounding, the latter allows them to benefit from translation services and techniques so as to resist language loss and keep cultures and traditions alive. Italian migrants in Australia have fought to preserve their cultural legacies and this tenacious attachment to their roots, passed onto their children, have paved the way for Australian multiculturalism. Migrants' unique contribution to the Australian urban and linguistic landscape is celebrated by Cattapan's work, and this is clear especially when we consider the manual addition of pixel-style dots and marks to his work.

---

[120] Maestri, 'Quale Europa?', pp. 288-89, 292.
[121] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[122] Simon, *Speaking Memory*, p. 6.
[123] McAuliffe, Cattapan, p. 138.
[124] Cronin quoted in Kaisa Koskinen, 'Linguistic Landscape as a Translational Space: The Case of Hervanta, Tampere', in *Language, Space and Power: Urban Entanglements,* ed. by Jani Vuolteenaho, Lieven Ameel, Andrew Newby and Maggie Scott, Studies across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 13 (Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, 2012), pp. 73-92 (p. 90).

These 'thick' marks, translating verbal, visual, electronic and acoustic systems, are an attempt to grasp the urban-inflected signs and languages spoken by generations of migrants and, as a consequence, an effort to acknowledge their distinctive contribution to the physiognomy of the polylingual and polysemic city. By translating the global city in a thick manner, Cattapan celebrates his subjective imprint on the city life as a child 'raised out of a migrant background'[125] and the migrants' attempt to enrich and complicate the multifaceted, multilingual and multicultural identity of their city. Like words or dots, his pieces of visual artwork represent prominent modes of signification and provide 'narrative layers'[126] whose signified, in Lefebvre's words, 'correspond to a specific use of […] space, and hence to a spatial practice that they express and constitute.'[127]

Conclusion

Cattapan's migrant position, in-between heritages and cultures, encourages him to reflect on the meaning of migration, mobility, movement, verbal and non-verbal languages and sign systems. The latter complicate the cityscape, but they also unveil a relentless attempt to celebrate the diversities and differences sculpting urban layouts and linguistic landscapes. Despite their complexity and multilayered nature, these landscapes conserve the exceptionality and inimitability of the global city. Not only are the assonances or dissonances between the languages brought into the picture (literally speaking), but the interface between computer-assisted spaces and physical spaces is also displayed and challenged. The aim is not to represent the dominance of technology over space or the ensuing sense of powerlessness it creates. Nor is it to show the viewers' inability to engage intelligibly with technology or the untranslatability of digitization processes, discussed, for example, by Weise.[128] The aim is to represent multiple forms of diaspora across spaces and places, including the richness of virtual ones. Mediating diaspora as a second-generation migrant does not entail translating an in-between place *per se*, which in Tymoczko's view, and before hers, Anthony Pym's view,[129] is a fantasy. It entails inhabiting multiple places – just like Cattapan's migrant father metaphorically sitting on two chairs – and translating multiple spaces at the same time: 'One must conceptualize the translator not as operating *between* languages, but as operating […] in a system inclusive of both.'[130] Cattapan's cities are not exclusively Italian or Australian. They

---

[125] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[126] Cattapan, Interview with Maestri (2014).
[127] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 16.
[128] Weise, 'Jon Cattapan', pp. 42-49.
[129] Anthony Pym, 'Alternatives to Borders in Translation Theory', *Athanor*, Lo stesso altro, 12.4 (2001), pp. 172-82.
[130] Maria Tymoczko, 'Ideology and the Position of the Translator: In What Sense is the Translator "in between"?', in *Apropos of Ideology: Translation Studies on Ideology,*

are a mixture of various nationalities, which, despite their hybridity or contradictions, pay tribute to the artist's ethnic roots and origins.

Finally, Cattapan's translated cities encourage his viewers (migrants and travellers) to reflect on the agency and power that they exercise and to become social agents in charge of the constant transformation, adjustment and accommodation of the city. Cities are not just 'inferno' or 'sites for migration, displacement and bi-cultural otherness' inhabited by migrants as the 'dispossessed.'[131] And migrants are not just others or passive individuals, lost in translation and overwhelmed by 'global media and technology […] effacing indigenous local cultures.'[132] Migrants, endowed with multilingual and technical competences, are the backbones of urban environment, its scaffolding and foundations. Empowered by Cattapan's paintings, viewers are constantly invited to reflect critically on their contribution to the urban morphology of the place they inhabit and on the interaction with the space that hosts them. Cattapan's 'thick' translated cities reveal a clear attempt to acknowledge the migrants' writing of the city, namely 'what is inscribed and prescribed on its walls, in the layout of places and their linkages', and the migrants' sensitivity to 'the *language* of the city', namely 'particularities specific to each city which are expressed in discourses, gestures, clothing, in the words and use of words by the inhabitants.'[133] Cattapan's migrant background informs his work and urges him to pay respect to the multicultural, multilingual and multisemiotic diversity of the migrants' city.

IMAGES:

Captions as follows:

FIG 1:
Untitled, 1990 (From *Travel Suite* 1990-2015)
Gouache and watercolor on paper, Collection National Gallery of Victoria
Image courtesy the artist.

FIG 2:
The Bookbuilder, 1992
Oil on linen, Collection Artbank Australia
Image courtesy the artist.

FIG 3:
Study after Endless (Melbourne), 2014
Digital print and gouache on paper
Image courtesy the artist and STATION.

Ideologies in Translation Studies, ed. by María Calzada Pérez (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2003), pp. 181-201 (p. 196), italics in original.
[131] John Conomos, 'Jon Cattapan', *Eyeline: Contemporary Visual Arts*, 27 (1995).
[132] Conomos, 'Jon Cattapan' (1995).
[133] Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, p. 115.