



**G. Paolini, *La verità in quattro righe e novantacinque voci*, edited by S. Risaliti, Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1996.**

In the form of an ABC, this book comprises ninety-five short texts by the artist on the same number of items suggested by the editor. The texts are overprinted on drawings by the artist, and the list of items is as follows:

Accademia [Academy]	Estetica [Aesthetics]	Orientamento [Orientation]
Allegoria / Retorica [Allegory / Rhetoric]	Forma [Form]	Osservazione / Visione [Observation / Vision]
Analisi [Analysis]	Geometria [Geometry]	Passato / Presente / Futuro [Past / Present / Future]
Analogia [Analogy]	Giudizio [Judgement]	Perfezione [Perfection]
Antico [Antique]	Idea / Simmetria / Totalità [Idea / Symmetry / Totality]	Pittura [Painting]
Armonia / Classicità [Harmony / Classicality]	Illusione [Illusion]	Prospettiva [Perspective]
Arte [Art]	Illustrazione [Illustration]	Rappresentazione [Representation]
Artista [Artist]	Immaginazione [Imagination]	Realtà [Reality]
Assoluto [Absolute]	Immagine [Image]	Riproduzione [Reproduction]
Autoritratto [Self-portrait]	Inaudito [Unprecedented]	Rovine [Ruins]
Avanguardia [Avant-garde]	Infinito [Infinity]	Scena [Scene]
Bellezza [Beauty]	Intelligibilità [Intelligibility]	Senso [Sense]
Chiarezza [Clarity]	Interno / Esterno [Interior / Exterior]	Sentimento [Feeling]
Citazione [Citation]	Io / Identità [I / Identity]	Sguardo [Glance]
Colore [Colour]	Ironia [Irony]	Società [Society]
Concettuale [Conceptual]	Labirinto [Labyrinth]	Spazio [Space]
Contemplazione [Contemplation]	Limite / Linea [Limit / Line]	Specchio [Mirror]
Cosmo [Cosmos]	Linguaggio [Language]	Spettatore [Spectator]
Curriculum vitae	Luce [Light]	Squadratura [Squaring]
Descrizione [Description]	Luogo [Place]	Stagioni [Seasons]
Desiderio [Desire]	Memoria (Mnemosine) [Memory (Mnemosyne)]	Stile [Style]
Dimostrazione [Demonstration]	Meraviglia [Marvel]	Storia (dell'arte) [History (of Art)]
Doppio [Double]	Metafisica [Metaphysics]	Tautologia [Tautology]
Eccentricità [Eccentricity]	Misura / Proporzione [Measure / Proportion]	Tela [Canvas]
Emblema [Emblem]	Modello [Model]	Tempo [Time]
Enciclopedia [Encyclopaedia]	Modernità [Modernity]	Titolo [Title]
Enigma	Mondo [World]	Tragedia [Tragedy]
Eros (Café)	Museo [Museum]	Unità [Unity]
Esempio [Example]	Natura [Nature]	Vedere [Seeing]
Esposizione (universale) [(Universal) Exhibition]	Nulla [Nothingness]	Verbale [Verbal]
Espressione [Expression]	Oggetti [Objects]	Verità [Truth]
Essere [Being]		Vuoto [Void]

#### ABSOLUTE

The absolute is a trap: I realised this right from the start, a trap I've always come up against, always pleasurably challenged, and I believe I'll go on living the deceit. I say trap and deceit but if it weren't this way I couldn't go on working... Knowing that there's nothing more relative than the absolute, I still like to make it survive in my thoughts, in my intentions: I need the absolute just as I need to understand each time that it doesn't exist.

## ANTIQUÉ

If the classical is distance, the antique is remoteness. The antique, the archaeological, the ruin are a remoteness that cannot be approached. They are that type of fascination which emanates from something intangible that belongs to our memory.

One cites the antique and sets the scene, seeking to give it proportions, what is said to be the practicability of the space of representation, in order to approach classicality. The antique is a citation and therefore an element with a wealth of charm, but it doesn't resolve the wager of the outcome... Because the antique is a fragment whereas harmony and classicality are a dimension.

## ART

From saying to doing... Nothing is done without saying as art is: it keeps quiet, doesn't answer the question, speaks without explaining.

## ARTIST

To forget everything, forget being one, to be one always and again...

Most of my writings and interviews inevitably, almost obsessively in recent years, include phrases and passages on the figure and role of the artist. So much curiosity and insistence must mean that I'm not an artist, or not the artist I would like or would've liked to be.

So the artist I am *not* has, should have, the following qualities or characteristics.

1. Know how to sacrifice "his" vision to the persistence of the visible, become spellbound and remain motionless before the marvel of language, yet without relinquishing the urgency of experimenting with it, which is to say fixing his eye on the *before* and on the *after* of its habitual function, always renewing its originality and therefore always and continually repeating.
2. Unawareness of adulthood, oscillating rather on a round trip between the élan of adolescence and the wisdom of the end. Does not express evaluations or judgements (does not judge because he does not possess).
3. Carry out each time in each work a rash gesture (but it isn't provocation), an outrage: an attempted murder or suicide depending on whether or not he indeed attempts each time, in each of his works, to take the floor and never give it back – to assign it to eternity – or whether he instead limits himself to listening, to observing the silence.

It may also happen that the two criminal designs are mutually confused and that not even the subject in question (the artist) is able to realise it, to perceive on which of the two chessboards his pieces are moving.

But there's one thing he must always know: that if the game may be risky or even fatal, it has its rules.

The point is to know whose rules, his or the game's.

## BEAUTY

The artist today is still, as he has always been, in search of or waiting for beauty...

Extraneous to any definition, beauty is a close relation of the infinite, of the dizziness of interpretation: but it is not set beyond an indecipherable perspective, in an extreme, unreachable farness. Always changeable, yet motionless, beauty appears in backlighting: we attribute to it the lineaments which our eyes have been trained to see *from the life* and which, instead, do not belong to it, that is to say are not enough to configure it, give it a face.

## CANVAS

I can't avoid repeating myself: "The white sheet, the virgin canvas are the point of arrival, not of departure".

## CITATION

Citation too is a kind of experience, valid in the moment in which it is grasped, not valid once for all, it must be acclimatised to a certain reason, a certain urgency. A memorial tablet is there for the perennial instruction of those who read it; a work of art is more precarious, ciphered, and must be treated and interpreted with a certain delicacy. I detest and have always sought to avoid the kind of citation that stands as formal equipment; it should always be used in a direct, literal way, citing the source and never the atmosphere. I have taken advantage of citations, all of which however led me to an act of language and not merely a tribute to memory, to the antique: citation is not regret; if anything, citation is *clausula*, mark of authenticity, never generic re-evocation.

At this point I like to achieve confusion of original and copy. In that sense all systems are good ones as long as that datum is captured, and it doesn't matter whether it's done by hand or photocopied, because it is valid in that moment just as it is.

What emerges to view in a work of art is the flash that skims the horizon of our glance, and all ways of seizing and fixing it are legitimate. This wandering of the image through the whole course of art history, this emerging and plunging, re-emerging and re-plunging, catching our eye yesterday, today and tomorrow, is that indescribable moment – consecration of thing without original body – which we call apparition.

## CONCEPTUAL

From the painter with a model to the work without author.

## DOUBLE

"From the allusion, the illusion. Two = infinity", I wrote some time ago. For me double means more than simply doubling one time, seeing in single and return, in juxtaposition, in perspective ad infinitum, circling around: it is also the definition par excellence of the image, because the image always duplicates something that was already around the blank canvas. Everything is played there, in the most varied procedures of reproduction and duplication. Right down to involving and duplicating one's own work, to placing it in the moment in which it comes about as a questioning of itself, as possibility of replication and as a return of the whole grouping of works onto the first, beyond which, after infinite variants, it is fatal to return.

## (UNIVERSAL) EXHIBITION

An exhibition – needless to say – is there to put forward objects, to offer us images. But an exhibition, in turn and as such, is also an image. A frame of time and place delimiting the area we are observing without a prescribed itinerary (the *direction*\* of the visit) but instead actuating the *mise-en-scène* of the work (the *non-direction* / *non-sense* of the representation).

All this suggests a consideration: it is our point of view, not the object (always the same or destined to become so), it is the trajectory of the eye (always different and in any case unrepeatable) that draws, who knows where, the space of the (universal) exhibition.

\* Wordplay lost in translation. The Italian *senso* means both sense and direction (T. N.).

## FORM

*Sample without value*, or even *Unknown term*: especially because it doesn't "terminate", doesn't come to fixing itself definitively, to completing the passage from dimension to measurement.

This is why it remains unknown: gifted with an (all too) strong vocation, it takes on ever different aspects and doesn't succeed in giving itself a name.

## GEOMETRY

Geometry gives great security and, like all support bases, elicits trust, puts you at your ease: it's a guiding principle through which the image can permit itself long excursions and also actual transgressions, anomalies. Geometry allows me to lose myself, knowing that I'll find the way again.

## HARMONY / CLASSICALITY

Maybe harmony and classicality are the same thing, something that keeps its distance from our everyday moment, something we always want to trust in but which, like the absolute, is not easy to reach. I spoke of distance inasmuch as classical and harmonious are something already whole in themselves, which we enjoy in observation only to find ourselves within the thing observed. And we remain listening...

## I / IDENTITY

My identity, my role as artist, is that of guest. Someone who is welcomed with respect (and observed with suspicion): although the name is right, nobody had invited him, nor does anyone remember ever having seen him before.

## IDEA / SYMMETRY / TOTALITY

Now and then I find myself thinking with a certain apprehension about the eventuality of setting up a retrospective show or putting together a catalogue raisonné of what I've said and done to date. I am increasingly approaching the idea of venturing into a hypothesis which at bottom is subtended within each individual work: to allude, in a word, to a vertiginous totality where the individual episodes are gathered in a sort of concentric symmetry, implode or explode from a central point whose fragments in turn reflect the belonging to an original "idea".

## IMAGE

The image is all: it translates, in the moment, into the work I'm about to complete and will be transferred to the work I'll be tackling immediately afterwards...

The image is that filter, that transparent diaphragm which deposits its traces on the surface of the work but is not exhausted, not extinguished; it's the permanently burning fire that illuminates other new horizons: it's the identity of our glance.

## IMAGINATION

The imagination is the somewhat disordered antechamber of the living-room which is the work that then appears. It's the recondite, secret storeroom, the dark and mysterious territory that keeps the threshold of the work open.

I don't frequent it that much, don't have many interactions with my imagination, I don't go probing too deep. I'm also afraid that in knowing it better I would end up without the very lively curiosity I have for the image.

## INTELLIGIBILITY

The measurement that renders an absence comprehensible: in this sense it is curious how a work is about to be there and at the same time cannot wholly reveal itself. The balance that cohabits in the work is that of having its papers in order so it may be deciphered yet not wishing to show them. In brief, to always leave a touch of the obscure or uncertain, since nobody is there to guarantee, not even the author, that it could not be other than the way it is. Intelligibility is a window from which the work looks out but which seems to half-close immediately afterwards or in any case not open wide.

## LANGUAGE

The artist lives in the open: that insatiable predator of images who is the artist would never at bottom do anything bad if he always knew how to discern the sense of limit, in a word, to maintain the distances dictated by that precious gift called language, a dimension and measure which he himself has established but which, equally liberally, he often and willingly allows himself to transgress...

So his freedom (why not grant it?) depends on good manners, on his ability to live in the world of ideas. His security, if we want to call it that, consists precisely in this, in his discretion, in that certain nobility or detachment, in the awareness of not having to request asylum.

## MEMORY (MNEMOSYNE)

Not present at roll-call inasmuch as it does not respond when invoked. Memory is like the future: it's there but you can't call for it, it isn't an archive that can be drawn on as you wish. It's memory itself that gives you appointments, and you don't know when...

The number of letters of the name Mnemosyne, nine, precede zero: this coincidence, the ungraspable nature of the name and sound of poetry, suggests an infinite vanishing point, removed from deciphering and interpretation, which might in turn extend elsewhere...

## PAINTING

If painting is by definition and perhaps really is "the art of representing by means of lines and colours" it is not, however, "the work thus obtained", as the dictionary entry adds impartially.

Calling a picture *painting* is not an extension of meaning: it's a contradiction. The painter's merit is to know how to remove from observation, to cause to be *seen* in spite of the picture, to illuminate the shadow zone between canvas and wall, to dig up the treasure.

So painting has few stories to make up or recount: they are those, only those, connected with its doing and undoing, appearing and disappearing, being or not being. One, at least one "coat" of paint, right on down to many, infinite layers of matter (graphite, inks, pigments, varnishes) spread in backgrounds, impastos, glazes... And dissolving, precisely in the instant in which it seems to be completed, to offer itself for observation.

Cézanne and Monet for example announced it without wishing to demonstrate it: their painting lessons are for "solo voice", leaving precisely to the paint the pure and intact timbre worthy of a noble instrument. They make no pronouncements, declare nothing that is not the dignity of looking, from two different viewpoints, at the miracle of representation.

The former witnesses the triumph of painting in spite of the subject, the progressive and inexorable weave of a curtain that he comes to forget, to substitute for the subject: So no change of scene: the subject (*La Montagne Sainte-Victoire*) can remain motionless, as it is, for the entire arc of the innumerable replicas.

The latter, on the contrary, illuminates the subject, frees it to the light on the screen of the canvas: it's the triumph of the subject in spite of painting, but it is still painting that consecrates its vibrations.

Miracles are not explained, nor is the sublime achieved or conquered: they simply are, and maybe more frequently than we believe. All that's needed is not to demand proof and, even more so, not to press for an appointment.

## PERSPECTIVE

Let's try to define it: essential rule for not losing sight of that something which lends serenity to a composition, practicability to the image, which allows us to "come onstage".

In the same instant perspective opens and closes the gates of representation. The infinite vanishing point cancels out weights and measures: impossible to "grasp" the object which disappears, swallowed up by the same perspective structure that rendered it visible, but incorporeal, beyond the plane of vision.

The artist today cannot and does not want to deny perspective: which is no longer only an artifice to resort to in representing an object but a contrivance that allows him to shift the plane of representation, to observe – in perspective, precisely – the very surface of the picture.

A picture is the perspective of all the pictures that have preceded it, as if "that" picture could not be other than that picture.

## PLACE

I will only repeat: The place of representation is the space needed for announcing it.

## REPRESENTATION

If Schopenhauer were still with us to repeat it today he would deserve a better welcome: it is representation that gives a name to things, promotes them to figures, characters that only thus can we succeed in recognising. The only (emergency) exit from the world.

## SPECTATOR

All of us (I'm talking about we artists) are spectators of that ungraspable character, that alluring protagonist who is... the spectator.

## TAUTOLOGY

I used tautology above all in my first more radical works around the sixties, where the image of the work was itself the image of the canvas on which it set itself as copy.

Tautology in and for itself would be worth nothing if language were not there ready to accommodate it as a useful thing in the sense that (and this goes for all other linguistic devices) it is the attitude of the artistic language in that given moment which makes the rhetorical artifice resound. But if that moment is not propitious, that tautology has nothing to share with the reasons of the work.

The possibility of breakthrough, of suggestion, of overcoming expectations with regard to an image, comes about precisely when those given combinations are on the axis of equilibrium which, in that phase, seems to accommodate them. If there is not this combination of elements then everything is undone or not even composed.

## TRUTH

I am increasingly convinced that truth corresponds to silence. Everything speaks, we have all spoken enough (by keeping quiet, on the other hand, we might give the impression of knowing it, even of exhibiting possession thereof). If we really still want to make pronunciations, all that remains (and I've "spoken" about this elsewhere) is to listen.

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Translated from the Italian by David Smith.