

Time is an animal; one that turns your belly into its lair. Everything tingles there, where it digs out its den—deeper and deeper—and settles in. Its home is a spiral, winding deeper with every step. There lies the animal, which is time. There, on the spot where it lives, it moves, breathing in and out: the double rhythm of a contradiction that you call life. Otherwise, nothing, nothing but a dream. What we call time.

Animal / Absent

This is what one runs up against when writing: he felt as if a wild beast were hiding in the room, ready to pounce on him. Frightened, he looked inside the little space with the peeling wallpaper and the unmade cot.... Although the room and the bed were completely unfamiliar to him, for a moment Yakov had the incredible feeling of having seen them before.

That was the game we used to play when we were children: in order to see the hermit crab, we would break its house with a stone. All of a sudden there was nothing to see. All that remained was a small, reddishcrustacean, bare as all hell. It was a vision from some scary realm. It ran, scurrying here and there, until falling prey to the fish.

You've already seen the animal, of course. But recognizing it is impossible, since this requires a distance—which always remains to be discovered. This animal hides. You would think it's playing with you. Just because it's there before your eyes the whole time doesn't mean you can see it. Even when we think we need to relearn how to see, this learning requires an unlearning: safety—what we think we need to be able to move around in the world as if it was all clear and obvious—is the first thing we need to work at unlearning.

At the mouth of the shell there is neither entry nor exit. More than anything, it's a breach, a mute opening. Words can be put in its mouth. But we only put words in the mouth of something or someone who is mute. We could make that mouth speak; we could endow it with speech. But in reality it's nothing but a weak point, a fault line, a caving in, where the risk of a fracture is always lurking. Pets, children, our own body, perhaps even certain memories we are unaware of—are points of this kind, where everything shatters into pieces. They lie there, between love and death. It's just insomnia, the doctor told her. But it's when she stops listening to that crying that she completely falls apart, unhearing, she is scattered, confused. It takes less than a day to lose oneself.

Camouflaging oneself is just another way to leave traces to diffuse them. Animal-time, a supporter of oblivion, is reflected against a dark background, which gives rise to reit (the mirror image of Tier, animal) and to teiz (the mirror image of Zeit, time)—and therefore in a certain sense also to reiz (charm, attraction): and thus once again the point that pricks. One is roughly the reverse of the other. Almost. It wouldn't take much (for it to appear). However, along the traces that it leaves and that signify nothing, even before it appears, areas open up where uncontrolled emotions still extend, unexpectedly. Perhaps only then do we experience what it's like having your skeleton outside your body.

Something similar happens with your childhood photos and their wonderful gaucheness. They reveal that a vast area of the not known stretches out around us, an area inhabited by that same animal, which everyone proceeds to ignore. Over time that gap—that entirely inconvenient, empty place—deepens, widens, and floods. As it extends, it no longer affects the image, but rather our vision, becoming a black, blind spot. It occupies a space, bordering the confines of the visible. And that singular lack of objectivity pierces through the witnessing that photographs always claim to provide of a time or a place. But absence is not something that comes from taking away, as we often seem to think: it comes from something extra entering the field of vision, giving it a spiral twist. The gap is that things always occur at the limit in which we don't know them. There, everything seems to be suspended. Yet its most authentic occurrence lies precisely in its suspension.

Think of the hermit crab, which winds itself inside the spiral of a shell it has found, and inside of which it lives from then on. There, it makes space for itself and when it grows, it has to find another shell, and grow in that one in its new state. So there is no growth that occupies an already given space; a space has to be obtained to allow growth; we have to get ourselves a space—to allow ourselves the possibility. This means accepting the trial of the spiral: twisting ourselves around the threads of a shell, since the spiral, in its turn, is nothing but the image of something that digs insistently on the same spot. In order to dig, one has to dig in one's heels, and pointedly so. Twist and turn, this is the law: the belly of time, its entrails. The spiral offers an entrance, to be sure, but not to everyone. The claws or the hands, but also the gaze, are held back at the threshold, both attracted and repelled by the gaping hole of the shell. We can't see what really lives inside it.

In that case, this animal that dwells in its own absence, deepening the gap, prying it open, could be described in the way that Jean Genet wrote about his impressions of Shatila: even when you get close to it, you have the feeling that you'll never manage to touch it. But this situation does not leave him indifferent. It marks us, in other words, it makes us no longer how we were or how we thought we were.

So if there is art today; if we can still allow art to exist today (in the business world, etc.); if there can be speech today, under the dominion of opinions that create nothing but buzz and noisy solitude, perhaps it can only be here: in the wonder of extending the margins, of making them become more jagged and therefore longer than ever. In the wonder of deepening the hole in themselves that they carry along with them, of digging out their den through gestures and words, through breaths and visions. This means: consuming what naturally holds us up. It is there that the unprecedented possibility opens up of departing from what we had previously been immersed inside. It's not a horizon. No, it is not. What opens up there is an unapparent gap that we must pass through. And in blindness,

there is nothing else we can do: except defend the vulnerability day by day, because the only thing that is truly courageous is a defenseless heart.

Time is an animal, the animal digs out its den inside paper; it digs it out in a spiral form in drawings or photographs that lie on its surface. There it digs out the texture of time, which sometimes appears against the light. They may be faded colors or images whose tints seem to come from ancient times, much more distant than the times they intended to chronicle. All it takes for a feeling like this to arise are shadows, a veil of dust, or even a vague sensation, in faded colors or tinted in unlikely hues. That's the animal who presses crinkles into the paper or simply wears out its skin. It disappears, leaving traces of its passage that would otherwise be invisible. These are the signs that passers-by leave behind. It's a very strange animal, let's face it: and what if those traces, instead of marking its disappearance, actually marked its most authentic permanency?

Think of snails and their slime. Think of the tiny insects that bite into the pages of my books from the edge and those that attack from the center to gradually enlarge the hole that they created. They all stay on the margins, each in its own way. And they all extend these margins, enlarging them. And these traces of slow, patient laboring (which has nothing in common with the

frenetic pace of human work) do not lead only to consumption. In a sense, it's as if the points that the little insects cross and transform were softened, as if they took on a different intensity. It doesn't just create consumption, but also remarkable enrichment and growth. There in time, in the vicinity of animal-time.

So if nature moves by metastasis, we do it by filaments, by lines of slime in whose imperfection is contained white grace.