



DAY 1. Freedom.

I arrange the snails in several rows on a black panel. Slowly they begin to move, leaving shiny tracks. I find these tracks beautiful. They're what interests me. I'll find a way to market them. The trick - is to organize my business so that these snails work for me as efficiently as possible. I order, they execute. Will I have to pay them?... Probably. The days of slavery are over. The change in green salad seems suitable: cheap, easy to find, and above all it will satisfy their primary need: hunger. What more could you want?

All day long I keep an eye on them. I come back every half-hour to check on them: are they working well? Are they working fast? Are the results of their work satisfying?

What worries me is their need to escape. Why don't they want to stay where I said? It's a good place to be. But no, they need to go somewhere else. And they move. Little by little, they all escape. All but two. I watch them closely, thinking that perhaps their thirst for freedom is less pronounced than the others'. But then I realize they're dead.



DAY 2. The fear.

I didn't sleep well last night.

Last night I made the mistake of going home alone. After a hard day's work, I left them unsupervised in my gallery, thinking they'd work better at night in the cold. I went home, laid down in bed and that's when I got scared. No, I wasn't afraid they'd escape: there are thousands of them, and I'd have no trouble replacing them. But I was afraid they'd DO DAMAGE, THAT THEY'D INVASIVE MY TERRITORY. That they would climb up the walls of MY gallery, where MY paintings hang, that they would leave traces where I didn't ask them to!

They must obey me. I want them to obey me. I want them to give me the work I NEED, not the work they have chosen to do. I don't care what they want. All that matters is that they produce these tracks so that I can market them! They have to obey me. And why? Because the law of the strongest applies to everyone. Even snails.



DAY 3. A conversation between two leaders.

I slept well last night.

I spent some time looking for the solution to "protect myself from their damage", and I finally found it. Last night, before leaving my gallery, I collected all the snails and released them into the wild, in a field opposite. There are so many of them anyway that I'll have no trouble finding another batch of 'workers' for the following day. That way, I get a good night's sleep and they can stay at home while I can't keep an eye on them. There's no question of them occupying MY territory without respecting MY rules. Until I find a good way of making them respect MY rules, I prefer them to stay at home. I decide when they can return.

Today I welcome a visitor to my gallery: a gentleman in his fifties, very well mannered, cultured. He asks me why I'm bringing in a new batch of snails this morning.

I reply, not without pride: "I release them into the wild every night. They're living creatures like us. I can't make them suffer." I await his approval and appreciation of my ethical sensitivity to the living world. It's an argument that will add a 'responsible' label to my operation. I'm proud of my discovery.

The gentleman gives me a tender look, as if talking to a child who's just beginning to discover life: "Really, you're taking things too seriously. They're just snails. And between you and me, there are so many of them that even if you kill a hundred every day, nobody will notice."

He glances at a painting they're drawing and adds: "They do make really nice tracks, those crawlers. You should sell them."

Bewildered by this, I wonder if I should show my protest. After a moment of silence, I chose not to say anything. Eventually I realise that we belong to the same species. It's just a question of experience.



DAY 4. The basics of manipulation.

I slept well last night.

During the day it gets hotter and hotter. According to my observations, they find it difficult to work above 28°C. Today they were motionless all day. I'm furious: despite my greetings, they move a few centimeters and then freeze. They have the ability to produce a little film that seals their shells to keep the inside cool. Except that doesn't work for me. I lose time! They have to work! The temperature drops at night. I know that they come out at night. They move. They move around. They draw the tracks. And tracks are the only thing I'm interested in. I have two objectives in mind.

Goal number 1: secure their working perimeter to limit the risk of them invading my territory. Goal number 2: to force them to work and increase production.

I decided to take things one step at a time, aiming for the first goal first. I thought for a long time, looking for the most effective way of getting them to move. There are several possibilities: promising them a reward, say a salad leaf, to motivate them to move. Or I can scare them. I love this method. I can also make them dependent on a specific product by telling them it's essential to their survival. They'll go to the ends of the earth to get it. No... all this requires a brain a little more developed than a snail's and, above all, a minimum of consciousness... I chose a very simple but still effective method: I targeted their weaknesses. I decide to limit the 'authorised' perimeter, by setting up an obstacle that they won't be able to cross. This last solution seems to me to be the best.

I have a feeling I'm going to have a good night.

DAY 5. The danger comes from the most hardworking.



I slept well last night.

My first goal is to secure their working area, so I set up my system: on a black sheet of paper, I place four snails and create a physical boundary: a barrier of sand all around them. I focused on their weaknesses: their difficulty in moving around on sandy surfaces, because their slime keeps them moving and the sand absorbs it. I watch them. They come out of their shells, move inside the barrier, turn around to meet the sandy obstacle. Suddenly, one in four takes the risk anyway. He finds a gap. He climbs on top of the largest grains of sand and little by little he succeeds. He exceeds the limit I set him. I put him back in his place, in the center, I reinforced the barrier, but I think he understood that there could be a way out. So, for a long time he kept going round and round, searching, persisting. Then he stopped. Finally, he gives up. He closes his shell and doesn't move. It took him 1 hour 27 minutes to make this decision. He finally surrendered to me. Having said that, I got 1h 27min of continuous work out of him. He is a valuable worker, but dangerous at the same time. How can I use him without his desire for rebellion causing me problems?... Should I favor less rebellious workers to the detriment of my work force's efficiency? A dilemma to solve.

And the other three? The first didn't try to escape. He made a timid attempt, but gave up just as quickly. He shut himself away so that he didn't have to expend any more energy. No means no. He's very wise. At the same time, he's not going to help my painting...

The third was much more persistent. He moved almost as much as number 1, but his problem was quite different: a number 4 snail climbed on his back. And a whole snail - that's a lot to carry. It's impossible to get rid of. It's heavy and you have to deal with it. A burden. After much effort, No. 3 gave up too. I'll make a note of it: it's easier to make a snail obey when you add extra burdens to it.

Tomorrow I'll think about improving my barrier: I'll use much finer sand, or even flour.



DAY 6. The weight of guilt.

I didn't sleep well last night.

Last night, when I left the gallery, I put the snails in a box to take them "home". I closed the box securely and left, forgetting it on the table. I realized what I'd forgotten when I got home.

All evening I'd been thinking about them, and especially about tomorrow morning, when I'd find them all dead from asphyxiation. I felt all sorts of things: guilt at my irresponsibility, rage at myself, but also fear of finding them dead tomorrow morning.

I could say that they died defending a good cause: they died for art. Is there really a good cause to die for? Defending an idea sometimes requires sacrifice. The problem is that they didn't ask for anything. I sent them to their deaths by a simple act of inattention.

What the hell! If art isn't a good cause, what is? It serves the whole of humanity, so it can take a few losses, can't it?

Do I have to justify myself because I've sacrificed a few lives? My other inner voice protests: these deaths could have been avoided if I'd been less careless.

I try to let go of my guilt, and a very clear and cold thought pops into my head: "OK. It doesn't matter. They're just snails. There are thousands of them. I'll just throw them away and no one will notice. And tomorrow I'll bring more to keep my responsible operation going". This thought came to me in spite of myself, it was obvious to me and it froze me. It was as if the mirror had shown me my true face, and that face scares me. I never thought I'd be capable of believing something like that. That's not what we're taught in this civilized world. Yet these thoughts came. This dark part of me has shown its existence.

I think of that gentleman who came to the gallery a few days earlier. This thought I've just had confirmed that I belong to the same species as him. How many of us are there? What are we going to do with this world? I feel a great sense of responsibility, but at the same time deep despair at the immensity of these dark thoughts that arise in me despite my good education. Can we really go against our nature?

And then, how can we go on living with this guilt in our hearts? These deaths will never come back. I have two options: either I accept this part of me and carry on as if nothing had happened, or I suffer from my guilt. Obviously, I don't want to suffer. So, I accept it. I accept it. I bury it inside me so that I'm not destroyed by remorse. I won't have any trouble living with it. Not because I don't care about those lost lives, but just because I'm not prepared to throw mine away. After all, they're only snails.

In the morning, I enter the gallery. I open the box. They're all alive. I breathe in. Relieved, I release them. They move. Good! Now back to work! There's no time to lose.



DAY 7. Relocation.

I slept well last night. I didn't forget anyone at the gallery.

But I'm still annoyed. Admittedly, I've achieved my first objective: the snails are staying within a secure perimeter that I've imposed on them. But objective number 2 still hasn't been achieved: I have to force them to work despite the heat, which is slowing down production. A little excitement this morning: I found a baby snail that had spent the night alone in the gallery, forgotten under the boxes. It left a trace. Very thin, fragile and almost non-existent, but a trace nonetheless. A promise of a bright future. I notice that even baby snails come out at night. Of course they do! I have to make them work at night!

That's when I come up with a brilliant idea: relocation! I'm going to install my board directly in a field, and I'll put the snails on top so that they can work in the cool of the night. This solution solves my other problem: they stay at home, so there's no risk of them damaging MY territory. There's still the question of transport: I'll have to take the board to the field every night, but after all, it's still very cost-effective. I can't wait to try it out!

That evening I'll take them home and install the painting in THEIR field. What's more, I won't even have to pay them in salad! They have everything they need to live! Their needs will be met, my goal will be achieved!



DAY 8. The company that works!

I slept well last night.

I think I've got it! When I woke up, I ran out into the field to see the results of my night's work. The result made me jump for joy! I've done it! My business works, their tracks are visible, regular and shiny.

In the morning, with a light heart, I come to the gallery. To make my installation last, I put the snails back on the board. I have nothing more to fear. It's too hot. They won't move today. They won't damage anything. And since I've found a way of getting them to work at night, I'm feeling calm.

The only thing that keeps bothering me is their smell. It's a pungent smell, unique to them, when they're in a group. I can feel it in the pit of my stomach. It's a mass smell that makes me nauseous. I might have been able to love them, but this smell brings me back down to earth, reminding me that they're not like me, that we belong to different species.

But that doesn't matter. All that matters is my success. I've found the perfect solution to make my business work. Outsourcing. Night shifts. I hold the golden key. All I have to do now is mass-produce these paintings. In fact, I'm definitely going to relocate my business to the field. After all, an art gallery is no place for snails.

They're not like us.