THE VOID THAT AWAITS THE FORCE OF ANXIETY

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Into the patterns of life that recur in oneself and on all sides, filling the days, there come undercurrents of anxiety. Moments when, unoccupied in one’s apartment a Sunday afternoon, or else hands and head attached to the too familiar tasks, one begins to feel oppressed by a feeling that with the incessant passage of the minutes the ground is slipping away; one comes to feel a sense of inconsistency, of being adrift where there is nothing sure to grasp on to, emptiness under one’s hands and feet. The clearing that wakefulness opens about us, making a landscape of substantial things accessible, seems in such moments to dilate and infect them with its own emptiness.

The force of life in me cannot direct itself to the things about me without traversing the void of distance that separates them and makes them distinct from one another and from me and accessible. It is thus always a passage through emptiness. There is an element of groping that is characteristic of the movements of a living hand. And in reaching for the good solid things the forces of my life envisage what they are for, good for, envisage already what lies beyond them, that is, look from the format of the present things toward the uncertain depths that lie beyond them. In each power in life, grasping for what lies beyond the solid already there, there is felt the possibility of touching a blank. In all anticipation there is a sense of the void.

But there are moments when the most patent and pressing
everyday things seem empty. The sense of their being already known dims the force of intrigue by which situations and events lured me; the sense of the equivalent effect of every task being already achieved, elsewhere, makes its imperatives but apparent. One comes to feel that it is life in oneself that is forcing itself on them, rather than being drawn by their substance. The horizon each morning is full of proliferating forms, there are no gaps in the field of vision and no end of things to do, but there is something inconsistent in the gleam of things and the urgency of their combinations, and one feels the emptiness.

The sense of emptiness is anticipatory; it divines the void beyond, behind, the apparent substance. The moments when anxiety generalizes anticipate a state when my powers would no longer gear into anything, when life could no longer do anything, would no longer be a stream of forces germinating potentialities and realizing possibilities. The anxious feeling of being adrift in emptiness anticipates death.

In the apparent interest of the problems that recur there dawns the possibility of insignificance; in the apparent urgency of the tasks one feels lured into emptiness. In the midst of the very tensions and exertions by which one is a force in the everyday landscape, one feels menaced with dissolution. This feeling of one's existence being vulnerable is not the feeling of some part of one's substance being exposed to determined threats; it is rather the premonition of a situation in which the void opening up on all sides would make all life's forces impotent. This possibility is not only an exterior menace. Life feels itself in the tensions of its powers; in existing as a stream of apprehensions, forces that reach out into the distance and beyond whatever is presented, life itself brings to itself the sense of emptiness. The possibility of being projected into the void is then not only felt inside, in the tremor of anxiety, but is produced inwardly. The possibility of annihilation infects all one is, no core is left intact. One comes to feel insubstantial; all one is actually is felt to be a field germinating possibilities, a movement of powers.

Yet the patterns of behavior themselves which my force and that of others vivify are not threatened; they recur. The operations my life consists of — working such punch presses, reading such newspapers, amassing such bank accounts, retracing the theorems of Euclid — will go on, will be taken up by others equivalent to and interchangeable with me, as they have been taken up by my forces from others. Even when someone is seen...