

Death in Field

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January 3

My days are diverse and without end. Today I was a workplace bully, my fists raised in rage against a colleague; I was an overheated marathon runner, outstretched fingers grasping for a bottle of water as I crossed the finish line; I was a lineman, stretching precariously on a pylon high above the earth, my hot stick pressed in mock competency against a power line; I was reading the news on an iPhone; I was the warm fuzzy background to a bowl of crisps at an office party.

I write this surrounded by sheets of blank paper, flurries gathered up into large piles that loom all around me, ominous in the back lighting. My head is in my hands; I suspect I am a stressed out office worker. This evening, lying on a bed in the chamber adjoining my studio, I will sleep contentedly, the peaceful smile of sleepless sleep written onto my face; I am no doubt destined for an article on the important of being well rested, or an advertisement for a new line of polyester duck-feather pillows. Suddenly, without a word of warning, I shall turn, kick off the sheets, and lie, sprawled and sweaty, atop the bed, my eyes dead poppies, red rimmed anguish. My caption shall be “73% of men report difficult sleeping.” All these men will see my anguished brow beaded with moisture, and recognize that I am a piece of them all.

I do not know if I am someone else when I finally sleep. I do not dream.

January 12

Perhaps I should say something about how I got started in this business. Photography is my passion. When I take a picture, I alight upon the world's secrets, the moments of beauty it hides from itself, and I reflect them back out into the world. Taking pictures transforms me.

I was so tired of my previous jobs; I didn't get to see anything of the world. Instead, I counted it, put it in spreadsheets, and arranged it in brightly colored graphs. I moved from job to job—they were replaceable, identical insofar as I could not find myself in them. “I”

began the moment I left the office in the early evening, when I started taking photographs again.

I found out about micro-stock photography late one night. If, after the fact, I had asked myself what I had intended to do, I would have said I was looking for a way out, a new job, something to deliver me, but I suspect I just enjoyed the lulling rhythm of the mouse clicks, the soporific waves of images and words. I typed into Google “How to make money taking pictures,” and found myself learning about stock-photography.

Stock-photography is every generic image you see: it is the blood of in-house corporate newsletters, of magazines, of websites. It began at the same time as mass advertising. In the beginning, stock photography archives were made up of out-takes from commercial magazine assignments, recycled into generic images to be used by anyone who would pay; images that protracted the profit of a thousand small deliberations made by photographers in studios full of the latest brands. Stock photography was the double of every advertising shoot. By the 1980s, the demand for such photos was so high that stock-photography became an industry in its own right. Professional photographers began making generic images for submission to the archives of stock agencies. Such images cannot include brand names, which would immediately limit their appeal. It is an industry creating millions of commercial photographs in which advertising is forbidden.

Micro-stock photography only really started exploding much later, a website told me. “As stock-photography agencies moved their collections online, and excellent digital cameras became affordable for the general public, micro-stock agencies began collecting amateur photographs, offering almost the same quality as professional agencies at a fraction of the cost.” People were making good money from micro-stock photographs, from doing what they loved; from walking out of the office. I joined the industry just as it was beginning.

February 4

My debut application to join a micro-stock agency consisted of a series of still lifes, accumulations of trees and animals. A horse standing in golden light against the solid trunk of an oak. Writing that makes me laugh. I had no idea then: no idea what the agencies wanted, no idea what photographs are. I received a stock-rejection letter. There were too many objects in my photographs. Their meaning was not clear.

Undeterred, I tried again. A bowl of fruit. Apples and figs. Burnished reds and soft greens. Autumnal images. Again, a stock rejection. My fruit was imperfect. Scarred. Not what was required.

Again. Children. Laughing. Blue Sky. My stupidity now consisted in failing to get the necessary consent forms from the children, releasing their images into the world. When you enter photographs into the database, I learned, you sign away any control over how they may be used.

Again. A perfect apple. Carefully calibrated percentages of red and green against a white background. Perfect figs. Perfect apples. I was in.

Micro-stock photographs are literal. Allusiveness is not encouraged. Colors must be bright, the depth of field short, the images uncluttered. If there are people, they must have a mood, and that mood must be singular.

Today I took images for Valentine's Day—not for the magazines, whose editors must have long put February's issue to bed, but for the websites. I imagine their editors are looking for photographs right about now, and submitting my images at just this point will mean they should appear near the top of the search results.

Each image has to be key-worded. I learned early on that you should include as many keywords as you can to maximize the chance your image is found in searches. A picture of a house is not simply a house, but also a dwelling, a domicile, an abode. The picture of a young woman I took today, her mouth gently parted in a smile as she received flowers, was attractive, pretty, woman, girl, flowers, rose, gift, Valentine, Valentine's Day, homely, blush, blushing, beautiful.

It is the part of the process I hate the most. I sit there for hours, pouring through dictionaries, thinking of every possible linguistic variant for a blushing young woman receiving roses from an anonymous outstretched hand.

I also have to give each image a description: a one line snappy summary. The best-sellers have the worst descriptions: empty phrases as apparently obvious

as the images they presumptively describe. One of these photographs, of a smiling pair of businessmen shaking hands, is described as: "helping hands make for happy business." I have no taste for this. I end up drinking a quart of whisky before wearily titling my photograph: "She wants more than roses this Valentine's Day." Hopefully it will make the picture editors smile.

February 10

A long day. I had scheduled a shoot with a family I know that lives nearby; I wanted a picture for an article I imagine appearing in a women's magazine. "Can't communicate with your child?" I can as easily imagine the article as I can the image: a teenager's bedroom, a puzzle map of clothes on the floor, calculators and papers piled on magazines. I told the family: "I just want to take pictures of how Megan's bedroom really looks, please, you don't need to clear it."

They took me at my word, and their daughter's room was in disarray, a collage of last minute hesitation before parties and being too hungry to think. It took hours. I carefully went through it, re-arranging the clothes, tidying some away, taking others brusquely from closets and throwing them to the floor, clearing away the fast-food containers, adding scattered books I had brought with me, titles not visible; everything conspired towards an image of perfectly color coordinated mess.

If anyone ever reads this—and perhaps here, above all, I mean myself—I realize you despise me. But I register the emptiness of all this. I realize it, record it, and yet. I love it: working out the right lighting, the composition of the objects, measuring the angles. I am doing what I live for.

March 15

The market is getting worse. My pictures are not selling. The bills are mounting up. When I started in this industry, the standard of micro-stock photography was pretty poor. I learned fast. Caught the curve. Soon, I was one of the three photographers who dominated the international market. The office job was far behind me. In the forums for aspiring micro-stock photographers, they spoke my name, they looked at my images, they copied.

There are so many of us now. The number of photographs is growing exponentially. To those of you who wonder if there is a limit to the amount of images the world needs, I can tell you this: both the major micro-stock

agencies have announced they will no longer be accepting pictures of flowers or fruit, or of animals, or landscapes; it is, as ever, the natural world that is exhausted first.

Now, the agencies tell me, they want “concepts.” Perhaps it is just that I am old, perhaps I am too stuck in my ways, but I have never understood what this means. I have no excuse; my apartment is in a block of flats designated a “live-work concept,” and this surely implies something more than the fact that some of us work at home.

The stock-agency has examples on the website. A man, pencil in hand, cheerfully about to write something down on a blank pad, is titled “pencil and notepad—ready to record important ideas.” This, the website informs me, is a concept.

Photographs are not moods anymore, not even snapshots of moments. They are subjects, verbs, or objects: crystal clear pieces of narrative that can be assembled by a picture editor; stories so known to us that they must simply be hinted at, like songs whose words we have forgotten, but whose tune we dimly remember.

I need new ~~ideas~~ concepts. I am getting desperate.

March 16

Each site has a list of the current top-selling images. At one of the agencies: a burly man in a suit, lifting weights (the concept: our business is growing). A fat man in sports clothes looking smug, behind him, out of focus, a defeated man in a suit, crumpled on the ground at the back of the squash court (competitors defeated). A circle of hands holding each other, in the middle of them, a bonsai tree. A woman on the phone, doing the ironing.

I can spend days like this. Floating on the surface of so many images. It is, I know, a waste of time. Time that would be better spent making photographs, thinking about images.

It is a mistake to look at the competition. Everything is so transparent (top sellers, worst sellers, in each category of image: all just a button away) that the competition is already looking at itself. These are concepts already discovered, and inevitably, each will now have a thousand variants, and each of these in turn will have tens of thousands of words describing them (victory, success, vanquish, destroy, annihilate). I stare at these images compulsively, imagining myself, now as the burly man, now as the fat man; triumphant, ahead of the curve. This is never going to get me anywhere.

A better bet is to look at the top searches made by editors. The all time most popular searches? Woman, car, flower. In that order. Last week the top searches were: China, espadrilles, pretty, baked pasta, and naked (the last, an ever-present on such search lists, I discount as the work of bored picture editors).

I am going to be on the curve, giving them what they want. I am having baked pasta for dinner tonight. You know what will be on my feet. I shall be the image of what the world wants.

March 17

I am key-wording my images, adding descriptions. Today I took my new espadrilles out to the country, and posed—slightly provocatively, I like to think—by the side of my car, leaning back without a care in the world: “A shoe for the hard working man at leisure.” Now that is a concept! I had more difficulty with the photographs of pasta al forno I uploaded. I hate adding descriptions, those single lines that are supposed to transform an image into a concept. I cannot do it without feeling like I have betrayed the image, which, I concede, is ridiculous: as if an image *wants* anything. Maybe it is me, and not the image, that ends up feeling cheapened. Whatever. I ended up drinking too much tonight. Forgive my tone. In the end I choose an appropriate description for the pasta al forno photos: “Eating alone doesn’t mean eating badly.” Night.

March 21

Following the top searches is a mug’s game. There are now thousands of pictures of baked pasta, all browning cheeses amid radiant yellows. My photographs look pedestrian in comparison, and the editors concurred—not a single sale. Don’t even ask about the espadrilles. This week, the top food-related search is biscotti, and I imagine a world in which sales of the ingredients for biscotti (almonds, sugar, eggs) go through the roof, as everyone rushes out to take the pictures that will be used to sell biscotti. I won’t be trapped in that game anymore.

March 27

I canceled the direct debit. Stopped the subscriptions. I think I have at least another month before the landlord notices my rent hasn’t been paid. Sometimes, I think about going back to the office. When I triumphantly gave in my notice,

I remember beginning to scorn those who took pictures in their free time. They lacked, I felt, the power to live by their images: the commitment to take what they love, and make it into the center of their lives.

Those weekend photographs (wistful, nonchalant), are every bit as determined by the office as my photographs are by the commercial demands of the micro-stock agencies. When I look at amateur pictures, I always see the workplace. In a picture of a family outing, the father stands behind his children, caring, proud, and I see the father in the office, his face a patchwork of worries; I see the basic inhumanity that creates a world where everyone is an individual all the time, except with their family; the moment of community that shores up the whole edifice of loneliness. That is the amateur photograph, I told myself. I don't want to go back to that. If I am controlled by commercial demands, then at least, in my art, I am honest about it.

Now I am not so sure. There was a liberty in the snapshot I rarely find in my work today. Now it is more insidious. I am not sure I would find that liberty if I went back to being an amateur photographer. How could I abandon the technical perfection of my images? A perfect apple. Carefully calibrated percentages of red and green against a white background. All that would seem absurd if the picture was not to be seen, not to be part of something greater. I cannot give this up.

March 30

The secret of this industry is not in search terms. It is in gestures. Our world is made up of hands dancing with the sound of words, of faces scrunching with the pressure of mental gymnastics, of lips and fingers and cheeks, all moving to an unheard melody. Each editor is searching for a gesture, the one movement that will bring the piece together and articulate its mood. We all live surrounded by such gestures, and sometimes, they make us dance like marionettes.

Some gestures are dying. The doff of a hat is a foppish anachronism, a citation from another era. People will not understand such a gesture in two hundred years. It will be as strange as those extravagant Neapolitan hand movements that are said by some to constitute an entire language, one that recalls, not the Italian television that forms the national language, but the frescoes and mosaics of Pompeii that the national language deifies. Perhaps I am flattering our art, but I imagine stock photography, years

from now, forming a vast archive of gestures, to be poured over by historians and exacting method actors: here is the life-blood of history, the way it looked, the way it moved.

Some gestures are fundamental. They form part of a visual language; a sort of universally impoverished Esperanto that we all recognize. One of the best selling photographs in the micro-stock archives is of a young woman at a desk, her head turned back to the camera, one finger placed on her mouth, which is slightly parted. Seventy years ago, this was a gesture that made fun of a prim, repressed world. Now, deadened by thousands of advertisements (not to mention pornography), it is a visual cliché, an image we invoke only ironically, and our distance leaves its power intact. The fundamental tones of the image—female receptivity, uncertainty, wistfulness—resonate with us in a way the doff of a hat does not.

Some gestures are being born. Careless movements, the answer to unconscious urges. The approximation of a feeling distilled into fingers caressing the air. Maybe that movement will strike those standing around the gesture, maybe they will copy it, and the gesture will spread, giving body to an as yet unnamed feeling, or being taken up and used for other feelings, new and old. Then its meaning will condense. The gesture will gain its own tone and significance: it will mean, depending on the context in which it is used, either emphatic enthusiasm or the end of a relationship. In turn, people will then use the gesture to quote emphatic enthusiasm ironically, a distance that is a measure of the extent to which that new gesture has become a part of our world.

I want to capture these new gestures. My photographs will magnify them beyond measure. They will appear in TV dramas, boys will practice them in bathroom temples, and girls will take iconic photographs of themselves performing the gestures I first saw on a windy street. I will have taken that gesture, and purified it down to its most essential elements, which I captured, and placed in the archive.

April 4

I spent last week roaming around town. A frustrating enterprise. So few of our gestures belong to us. I walk, watching ghosts.

All day long people put their thumbs up: lorry drivers, dumping supplies off at the market, for whom a

thumbs up and a tick on the delivery checklist marks the barrier before the next stage in the day's duties; friends passing each other, each secure in a castle of iron and petrol, for whom a honk and a thumbs up is companionship felt through eight feet of air and two of metal. All these thumbs echoing yet more thumbs: Jackie Robinson to his fans, debuting for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1945, Tiger Woods returning to the golf course, immortalized in the papers, ruddy gestures on farmhouses after a day's work, Colonel Paul Tibbets to Captain George Marquardt aboard *Necessary Evil*, August 6, making sure he got a good picture.

To my surprise, I saw two hats being doffed. Full voiced shouts of gestures. I study the photographs I took of them, placing them against doffs found in pictures of old Hollywood film stars. This is not the gesture I am looking for. I am waiting for a gesture about which I can say: I have nothing to say about this gesture. I have nothing to say because it is not my place to say anything. I have nothing to say because it is not my place to say anything about a gesture that belongs so totally to a person in a place.

I didn't find that. I found a million Jennifer Anistons with heads at a slight angle, an angle mirrored by the slight quirk in the hair, mirrored in turn by those affected hands that touch cheeks and hips. What a fucking disaster. I am the flick of hair in the middle of my friends. The winning smile. Attention. Concern is a hand on a hip. Seduction teeth on a lip. The winning smile. Jennifer, I tell you, is a woman. A woman who is not a function. If this was a race for solitude, then Michaelangelo's *Pietà* has nothing on Jennifer Aniston. Jen is a woman who doesn't reflect other women, because she doesn't include them in herself, she doesn't refer to them; it is this aura of uniqueness that everyone so effortlessly succeeds in emulating. I try and imagine a new, improved Jennifer Aniston gesture, a function that reflects reality, but I cannot. I can only imagine Jennifer Aniston, bathed in uniqueness. This separation from the rest of the world is the story of every image of our gestures: its tragedy lies in its separation, a distance so vast it exists only in our minds, as an echo of a fame we already have. Endless mirrors of ourselves that we are. Batch living.

I wonder if I can find Jen in Africa. Perhaps, in Senegal, all those gestures will mean something different. Perhaps hands on hips, angled faces, and the flick of hair, will all take on a different resonance when there is war, or female circumcision, of any of the things we talk about when we

talk about Africa. I wonder if in a small village, where I do not understand any of the languages, where they eat things I have never seen, I will recognize that hand adrift on a chin, the lips forming a bemused smile. Friends, Season One. The smile is caducous. If only I knew what was underneath.

I don't. I can't even believe what I saw. I found a thousand Richard Nixons. The gesture is perhaps not his (Rodin lays claim to it), but it is Nixon who remains most present in my mind when I see it. The brow lowered, the lips closed, clasped fist under throat, or—a variation—fingers gripping chin. Deep in thought. Nixon liked that gesture. He used it a lot when he was photographed thinking about Vietnam. The more I see people use it, the more I become aware that it is not so much a gesture as a pose that suggests the frame around it.

I see furrowed brows, as if before our atrocities elsewhere, and I see them everywhere I look: I see them around corners, when I look down from windows, when I look up into flats, and I always see them from the same place. The camera's angle is low, it is looking slightly up toward the face, the distances between furrowed brow, pursed lips, hand on chin, and camera in hand are precisely calculated; when I am hiding at a second floor window, looking down, sometimes I think I can see the camera below the concerned thinker, moving to work out those important distances. Distances that become the focal clarity of our words, of our actions. I wondered, moving around the city, why we even need picture editors when we are so successfully the picture editors of our own minds. I am in the foreground of my own picture, and the frame is composed in relationship to myself: my story, my gesture, the rest is all white background or out of focus fuzz in a short depth of field. My gesture, my face, is clear. A clear face that expresses a real lack of clarity. Expressions of an expression. I am the concerned consciousness that knows no place. I am worried. I am deep in thought. I am really listening to you.

I was listening to you in Starbucks when the boss made jokes about your hair and you grimaced, I was listening when they told you that you could eat and you wanted to do anything but, I was listening to you at Bloomingdales when the distance between the red dress and the white dress was a chasm, I was listening to you on 45th when you told me John was leaving, I was listening to you when you screamed and I stared down at the floor, I was listening to you when my fist was tight against my chin, and your words made me

swim, I was listening in Wal-mart, when you couldn't hear anything over the noise, I was listening at the end, when you didn't have anything to say. I am listening. I am in the picture.

April 7

I am a hunter of gestures. Sometimes, I think I have spotted that unique gesture, about which I have nothing to say. It occurs at the edge of my vision, it suggests something to me before I turn to it, and give it my attention.

When I look at things directly, the world narrows. A hand becomes something that conveys information (an outstretched flat palm introducing the man on my left) or acts (an extended set of fingers, slightly inclined, inviting me to speak). A chair is a seat, a bank clerk an ATM. The entire world is composed of information and instruments. I cannot see gestures that way. And yet, I cannot quite see them out of the corner of my eye; they are suggested to me—a hand moving towards a cheek, a fearful look—and I turn my head, hungry, rapacious, only to find that they have vanished. A hand caresses a cheek at the edge of my vision, and I turn, only to find a man holding his hand against his face in mock affectation; a citation of a thousand television series.

I have walked the streets for a week and found nothing. Gestures slip past me. I cannot see anything.

April 9

The trick is to see nothing at all. I have stopped looking. Instead, I am upright, my back straight, in a booth at the IHOP, overlooking a busy intersection. My camera is concealed under a wigwam of menus. Aside from occasionally bringing a cup of coffee to my lips (a concession that allows me to keep my seat), I am totally immobile, my vision fixed. I allow what passes in front of my vision to pass. I sat all day today, keeping a mental inventory of every gesture I saw, and now, during this long night, I review them, frame by frame (my camera is programmed to take a picture every twenty seconds). I am nonjudgmental, unobservant, and all I see is Richard Nixon.

April 11

Today I saw something, right in front of me. The crowd pressed along the sidewalk, a wave lapping at the road, demanding entry. On the sidewalk sat a girl, an indelible

line traced around her, respected by the crowd that surged towards the intersection. Her gaze looked out at a point just above the IHOP. She is, I imagined, waiting for a friend, or else lost. With her left hand, her fingers absentmindedly traced the grain of the concrete between the slabs of the pavement, her skin occupying the dry hollows of the gray mass, feeling its astringency press against her flesh.

It seemed like she stayed there forever. Running her finger along the border between the pavement slabs, up and down, up and down. I go through the frames captured by my camera. She was there for an hour and fifteen minutes before it happened. In all that time, I record only four glances directed at her, four imperious hawkish regards from above, from the members of that harsh onrushing tide. She existed only at the edge of their perception.

At one hour, fifteen minutes and twenty seconds, in the one hundred and thirteenth frame of her existence, she abruptly presses her hand against her cheek, as if making an indelible mark. I have looked at that frame again and again. I cannot work out what that gesture means. Her mouth is slightly open, but not enough to suggest surprise (did she remember that she was to meet her friend *tomorrow*, not today? Unlikely). Did her fingers run across a particularly jagged bit of concrete? Why then are her eyes not narrowed from the pain? Is she feeling the cold of the concrete on her face? Definitely. Is there perhaps dust woven into her fingertips that she can feel, a soft feathering against her cheek? Definitely. I have no idea what this means.

She held her hand there for a long time, fingers barely moving against the flesh. People do not look at her. She is noise. If only people knew how powerful the effects of her gesture will be!

I wonder if perhaps someone, some stranger, saw the gesture out of the corner of his eye. Perhaps it will be used later, perhaps it answered that stranger's own need for contact, or perhaps it was simply inhaled by a body starved of intimacy, and will be exhaled that very night, when a stranger will stroke his lover and place his hand, still aglow with the heat, against his cheek, and then against hers, and, then, perhaps, his lover will repeat the gesture, with someone else (gestures can also be unfaithful), or, in a gesture of mock-intimacy, she will repeat the gesture with a man she is flirting with at the office, a gesture that points beyond the workplace. It will be in that very same office that she will recognize the re-enactment of the girl's gesture

I shall place in the micro-stock archive, and will then use my photograph to illustrate an article, whose putative theme might be creating a productive work place, but whose true subject will be the search for the physical.

April 13

I spent yesterday perfecting the girl's gesture. I am trying neither to imagine the articles that would be completed by such an image, nor what product it might sell. I am especially uninterested in what the girl *meant* by such a gesture. My focus is on condensing the gesture down to its essential elements; the life in the gesture that will lead it outside of the girl, into the world.

I sit on the same street, in the same place she sat. My fingers trace the contours in the concrete, my eye on the computer screen ahead of me, where half the screen is showing a slideshow of the girl during these crucial minutes of her existence, and the other half is linked up to a camera feed, directed on myself, as I try to match my preparation with the girl's movements. Suddenly, I place my fingers against my cheek. I stop, check my image, replay the last few frames. I practice, slowly raising up my hand, my eyes not on the IHOP, but looking directly at the screen, adjusting the angle of my hand, the tilt of my head, the placing of the fingers on the cheek. Everything must be perfect.

Today I was at home, in front of a white background, with the girl on a screen to the right of me, practicing the gesture, internalizing it. I found it difficult to create the same tones without the presence of the pavement beneath me, so last night I went out with a crowbar and chipped a sufficient amount of concrete from the street so that I could make a thin line atop white cardboard, along which I could run my finger before pressing my hand to my cheek.

In the evening I began taking photographs of the finished product. Hand on cheek, fingers pressed. It took me over a thousand shots before I was satisfied. Finally, though, it was finished. There it was, as perfect as a calligraphy. The gesture.

April 14

A difficult day spent in language. I have to keyword the picture and give it a description. No keywords seem to fit. I almost feel ridiculous: a middle-aged man staring at a photograph of himself holding his fingers to his cheek. I reassure myself that my problem is inherent to the photo: how

can I keyword a gesture for which there are as yet no words? For which there are not even definitive associated feelings? I begin, trying to sculpt the words to the image of the girl I hold in my mind's eye: searching, touch, real, contact, help, lonely, alone, loss. Surely loss always sells?

But this does not seem adequate to the picture, to my vision of the women pressing their fingers into lover's breasts and then holding their hands, still radiant with heat, against their cheeks. I add more words: hand, cheek, fingers. My amateur anatomy lesson, I realize, will bring only those who are looking for photographs to illustrate hand cream. Hardly a fitting purpose for my gesture. I imagine instead all the possible worlds in which my gesture might be used: all the wonderful worlds it will enrich, and I begin writing down a torrent of words: dawn, sheets, warmth, happiness, hair, satiated, contentment, peace.

April 18

The photograph was rejected. There were, apparently, too many keywords, and I had inexplicably left out the description. I began again, and spent today removing what I had added yesterday. I slimmed down the keywords to the anatomy of the gesture: hand, cheek and fingers. I left a couple of emotions as key words in order to deter the hand-cream sellers: loss, contact. The description? "The forlorn touch." I just have to trust in editors' imaginations. In their ability to see something that has never been seen before.

April 21

One of the major agencies accepted the photograph. The world will begin to see itself again!

April 28

Nothing. Perhaps I put too much faith in the editors seeing something in the photo. Editors, salesmen: they are all dealers in desire, they create wants for things people do not have but can recognize; they deal in potentials and probabilities, not in things which have no place.

I am still on the street, looking for gestures. The girl has not returned.

May 6

Still no sales. Since I last wrote, I added three more images I found using the same method: people reaching for something authentic, being ignored, continuing. I don't

think these gestures are a private language, I simply think we are so attuned to the half-life of stunted expression we call civilization that those forms which hold within them a potential for the expression of something meaningful, something risky, are determinedly ignored: thrust to the edge of our vision.

I now realize these gestures, these gestures for which I have searched for so long, are not even new. When did our capacity for novel gestures become extinct? I imagine a distinct moment, around 4000 B.C., somewhere in the Levant, when a tired shepherd threw up his hands in despair and unknowingly closed the book of human gesture: every angle, with every facial expression, with every hand, with every arc of movement, with every speed: everything exhausted.

It is reassuring then, that we forget. We are so good at forgetting that we are continually rediscovering things as if they are new. Movements become transfigured by new contexts, grasped in desire's urgency by a needy body, or stripped of content, and transformed into a hand-cream commercial.

May 12

No sales. I was a fool. Why would the world want gestures it tries so hard to ignore, that it turns into noise and leaves by the side of the street? People do not understand the gestures they need. They let them die. Maybe they are too difficult, too testing. And people prefer the easy moment. The bad repetition.

I was lying awake all last night, thinking about what to do. Surely, if the world does not recognize the gestures it needs, the photos it needs, then they need to be created, forced upon people cleverly. I will invent them. I will invent everything anew.

I will invent the world, and the world will see itself in me.

May 14

Every day is an experiment. I feel alive! Vital. I wake up, and promptly stretch my arms out, yawning, blinking in the bright light, feeling my body awake, staring directly in front of me at the cameras.

They are set up all around me, programmed to take a picture every ten seconds. I hold my pose and hear their digital clicks, see my reflection immediately appear on the

computer screen on my bedroom wall.

Banal. Undeterred, I begin again. I dive back under the covers. Closing my eyes, I rise, stretching my arms out in front of me at right angles to my body, my back rising while perfectly straight, trying to keep aligned with the top of the white screen behind me. Too stiff. Back to bed.

I try to recall every moment of waking I can remember. Waking with Claudia. The face is most beautiful in the morning, when it retains the wonder of things; my face, then, must have retained a trace of Claudia's, and my eyes must have blinked in azure light, and my hand rested on my head in happiness (all my relationships have been built around gestures; condensations of intimacy given form). Waking in a motel, lost and alone in California, my body thrown out of bed by the conviction: I want to live. And then I remember every moment of waking I have seen or imagined: the waking of my lovers, of family, in films and on television, in books, at bus stops, and glimpsed during long airport mornings. I try to remember all this to purge it from my mind—I have to invent new gestures; corporeal forms that embody a whole new way of being in the world. I want to show the world this new way: how could editors resist me? I wake thinking of sleeping pills, of goose-feather duvets, of satin sheets. I wake to make new gestures, and each gesture must now have a destination.

I am excited this evening. Today I drank eight coffees. I posed and sipped in front of my cameras for hours. Last night I watched *Coffee and Cigarettes* again in order to study how people drink coffee, to banish all the old habits of coffee drinking from my mind. It is exhausting work. I try out a hundred poses, the cameras clicking away. For some activities, I am unable to find anything I am satisfied with. It all seems so derivative. Sometimes, after hundreds of tries, I come across something I truly think is unique. I am reinventing the world, one gesture at a time.

My life is distilled into sections: waking up, brushing my teeth, shaving, showering, making coffee. Honestly, that is as far as I got today. It all takes a very long time. In between sections I have to reposition the cameras, work out the lighting, arrange where I should pose, put up a white background. These moments are the only time I am not on camera.

Tomorrow, I think I will begin my day with coffee, and see how far I get.