

THOMAS

DANCING ABOUT ARCHITECTURE

Thomas poises his hands above the keyboard and he stares into the white field of Word. Nothing comes. He begins to pick at a tiny scab on his arm.

After a minute or so he refocuses his energies. He pushes the keyboard aside and lays his legal tablet across the desk, flips to his notes on last weekend's Elaine Radigue show.

He's supposed to be posting a writeup of the show on his website. He's also supposed to be writing something on the three-CD set of her *Adnos* pieces. He coughed up the \$40 for it over a month ago, justifying the expense by telling himself that at least he'd be able to get a review out of it. But he has written no review. He hasn't put anything on the website in two months.

He sticks a pen into his mouth, holds it between his back teeth.

On Monday he received an e-mail inquiring whether the site was still active, which gave him an awful feeling that he had difficulty shaking. He also recently stumbled upon an online essay, Mark Bernstein, on "Writing the Living Web," which contains the admonishment: "If you are inconsistent, readers will conclude you are untrustworthy. If you are absent, readers will conclude you are gone." So this evening he's guiltily reporting to work, fully resolved to get something done and up there on the site. His triumphant return. Quote unquote.

He gets up and goes into the kitchen, looking for the bottle of Jameson's. He stares into the cabinet for a few seconds before he can retrieve the memory of finishing it off. He shakes his head, thinks *What's wrong with me?*

It's not that he didn't enjoy the show. He did. He always likes going to see shows at 60th St, and he enjoyed this one even more due to the unprecedented attendance of a surprising number of attractive women. They were fashionable in a vaguely European way—he wondered if they were involved somehow with the French Cultural Center, which had helped finance bringing Radigue over from Paris. He found himself eyeing them throughout the course of the evening, checking to see whether they were being carried away by the lushness of the music. (This surprised him. He had always absently supposed that he would stop finding himself attracted to other women once he'd gotten into a sexually-active relationship; he figured that he would just filter out their physical traits, as a kind of irrelevant data. But that hasn't happened at all. Since he's gotten involved with Janine he has probably been more attentive than ever to the sensuality of the women around him. This makes him regret not having sex with Lydia, back when they were dating. He wonders how their relationship would have gone differently if he had entered it as he is now.)

But anyway—despite Bernstein's encouragement to "be sexy," Thomas doesn't really want to write about the erotic dimension of the evening. He wants to write about the performance, report to his readers on the quality of the drone that Radigue produced. He already has a whole page of notes, all he needs to do is string them together.

He returns to his desk, sticks the pen back into his mouth again, leans back in his chair and holds the legal pad up above his face.

This should be easy. He's never really bought into the whole idea that it's difficult to write about music. When Thomas was first learning HTML from Janine, he told her that he wanted to do a site of drone reviews, and she said *You know what they say: writing about music is like dancing about architecture*. If that's true, Thomas does the dance well—he's developed a whole set of ways to rhetorically approach a drone. He once made a list of these strategies; it's buried somewhere in one of his tablets:

- overall timbre; timbre of various phases (sterile? dirty? wet? buzzing?)
- discuss shifts from one phase to another (the transitions define the character of the drone?)
- effect on listener (trance? anxiety?)
- sound sources (what technology or object actually produced this sound?)
- metaphorical sound sources (what technology or object (or occurrence or animal) *could have* produced this sound?)
- drone as political statement
- drone as spiritual expression or spiritual tool (magic)

He reads through his notes: *an even tighter cycling—a thrum—eventually an almost percussive element enters—the sounds of distant impacts*. They're thorough, and they work to bring him back into the space of the performance, like they should. But for some reason he can't start sculpting them into a writeup. The field of Word remains blank.

He keeps thinking *why am I doing this?*

Great, he thinks, *I'm having my mid-life crisis at twenty-eight*. Of course, he felt like he had it at twenty-seven, too, and he can remember feeling like he was having one at twenty-one, and one at seventeen. Based on the reports he's heard, it seems that what triggers the mid-life crisis is an abrupt eruption of self-consciousness. But Thomas can't remember a time when he didn't struggle with the discomfort of abundant self-consciousness. There must have been a time—maybe before age twelve?

Perhaps this is worth further study. He flips to a new page on the tablet and writes *self-consciousness*. Then it seems stupid. He crosses it out.