



Source: Michael R. Gordon, 'Marines offer no resistance as dancers land in Iraq', *New York Times in International Herald Tribune online*, 28/08/06.

Tags: [art](#), [drugs](#), [music](#)

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He had argued at dinner. Now on the steps of the house, he pauses, pushes his shoulders in, turns up the collar on his coat and ties the long waistband into a neat knot before setting off on his way. His soft hands clench in the depths of both pockets, his eyes are downcast, flicking between the lines of the concrete pavement running along Old Compton Street. It is now well after midnight and his warm breath billows out under the street lamps. His footsteps are muted by his crepe-soled ankle boots, the kind of footwear he has favoured for years.

This is familiar terrain. It's busy out, but he pays no attention to the humdrum of his surrounds. He ushers through lanes and alleyways with intent, keeping under the awnings of shopfronts to avoid the all-drenching drizzle of the London winter. The rancid stench of rotting fruit and vegetables lingers from the market stalls earlier in the day, all of it sagging drearily in the rain, lining the gutters and creeping towards the sewer grates.

His studio nestles between the warehouses and old bakeries of the city centre. A need was brimming inside him. Arriving at the small entrance, he checks over his shoulder before placing the key in the lock. He jerks open the security gate, oblivious to the noise of its rusted wheels running across the broken flagstones. 'George was here 15/8/67' is carved into the front door.

He clammers up the narrow staircase and enters the room. Pages of Joyce and Eliot, catalogues from past exhibitions and countless wine glasses discoloured from Beaujolais sediment carpet the floor. The one chair is draped with a paint-encrusted crew-neck sweater. He unlatches the hook on the metronome, also covered in paint, and sets its arm in motion.

He reaches towards a small tin. Empty. A search between the floorboards is rewarded. He retrieves a large pill wedged there, blows it clean of dust and swallows it down with a slug straight from the half empty bottle on the side table. Now he is ready for the hours of pre-dawn work. There are no preliminary drawings about. He prefers the direct approach, sketching a scene with his finger, and rubbing the surface with his palm, massaging it into being.

An image comes to meet him as his brain slows under the

weight of inebriation. The work grows fuller. Broad strokes and subtle lines rise and swoop across the surface plane.

His mind is twisting and turning now, recalling all the peripheral memories of the evening and his journey home. They come to him compacted, played out like a time-lapse film as he sways his head left and right. At times his eyes close while the brush moves on. He can hear the queue in the fish and chippery across the way, where two men eat a pound's worth of chips out of each other's hands and tease the ripe girl behind the counter about where the pea wet really comes from. He can see the pigeons flay, startled by his soundless approach. And he can smell the pungent mix of sweat and sex cascading down the staircases of the Soho brothels.

The hallucinations intensify. He tries to turn up the volume of his refrigerator until finally, when it reaches perfect pitch a grin spreads across his face. The metronome bends in huge arcs across the room. Engines roar and all the walls have become mirrors. He is in a lift, reaching for his heart in the infinite reflections angling off into the distance. Light pulses and he is wet with paint. Glass shatters violently and he is left standing in the front row of a chanting audience. The band is trapped in a droning rhythm, trying to fight their looped sound with no reward. He rushes the stage, turns around and wails into the microphone. He wails and he wails. He wails and he wanes.

He draws the grass curtains to, and shoos away the circling wasps from their nests. He strobes in and out of consciousness; finally comes to rest awkwardly on the floor. Beside him, the canvas drips onto the boards below.

The small window has been left slightly ajar. A morning draft pushes the exposed bulb hanging from the cracked ceiling back and forth marking time with the dull beating inside his head. He knocks back a glass of water and makes his way to the old single mattress in the corner of the room. He will sleep through the short daylight hours and wake at sunset.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by David Hagger.*