

Story for performance #950
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Source: Ed O'Loughlin, 'Gaza escape: too little, too late', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 26/01/08.

Tags: [dance](#), [drugs](#), [music](#), [disenchantment](#), [violence](#)

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Silver, drug-fuelled lights pump down around a glowing DJ. He's up there on his altar and God how I hate him. Like you wouldn't want to believe. So grandiose and gawkish, the way he spins in static rhythm, grinding just enough to fit within the heartbeats of the holographic music that he's raining down in turrets. Endless, aimless avalanches of vibration burrowing deep into electrified ears and the whole place stinks of imaginary ecstasy. You might think there's no such smell. You're wrong.

Men and women crowd around and bulge like entangled serpents. Their looks can kill. Their tattooed horror-show heads. Their grim baboon limbs. Their bubble brained enthusiasm. An army of vacant voodoo victims writhing and wailing and the way they glow in the spectral, feudalistic night makes me slither until I'm more reptile than them. Until I wish I were a ghost, so I could hang here and seethe and cast dispersions until the whole scene's swimming in my venom and I can watch them drown and convulse. Then again, they might not even notice.

I sit trembling at a table in the centre of the room, this square box of booze and breasts and bodies bouncing and I'm being bludgeoned by it until all I can see are these throbbing blips of light. The cushions on this blood red lounge feel wet and I wonder how I end up in these hellholes in the first place. It's masochism maybe. Lights are all, lights are everything and swirling and one mindless line of patrons angles towards a reality TV starlet. She's perched on a stool, signing autographs and her smile is faker than the balloon tits stitched onto her chest. An immense photo of her hangs from a twisted banner. She looks down grinning from the ceiling and her cleavage could swallow someone whole. Her giant body waves and blinks and wobbles while beneath, people flock with their pious drunken faces and ugly dilations to put an arm over her shoulder and smile into their phones.

A bolt of shameful realisation.

I'm alone. For how long now? Sitting alone in here. It's a sign of certain madness. Of the worm. I walk out into the crowd and the sound of bass overwhelms and withers and hammers like a shower of bricks and bottles. There's not much more of this to take. It's an overdose. All the stucco facial expressions and idolatry and imp impersonations dancing around: so dizzying, so dull and epileptic that I can feel froth flaring up. Someone spills a drink on my shoulder. Somebody laughs and points. I can see their shimmering eyes open way too wide and their mouth becomes a maw and I step backwards, tripping hideous onto the dance floor trying to get away but it doesn't work and then I'm the middle of the human storm. I stand there and scan the abyss of wriggling

bodies. I try to blend. There's no use.

Arm in arm the people warp like swaying flags. I sneak away into the relative quiet of a bar that's wedged into the corner. An alcove of sanity. My ears sound like cicadas are nesting in them. People hiss and scream and dance their way towards alcoholic wonder, hands extended in search of oblivion, yelling 'Woohoo!' at each other and I want to grab them and shake them and find out what they think they're doing.

I'm being too harsh. I know. So I drink a toast to them and the girl behind the bar rolls her eyes and walks away. I call her back when I'm done and drink again in silence. Meanwhile they're all around me. The endless procession swarms behind and about and beyond. I try to numb. It isn't helping and so I finish drinking and go back to the pumping music. I let it carry me away, getting swept between the bodies of two crumbling damsels.

A woman's face smiles at me through the gloom. An ugly, docile face. I grin back. Maybe this isn't the time for judgements after all. My head is slipping beneath the ritual, under the sea of arms, legs and breasts and Jack Daniels and all his marvellous magic. My blood feels thick. My chest feels fuller, my face is hot and harder and my legs have found their grace.

I make another run back to the bar for a final drink. And then another. Steam billows out of me. People stand beside me and I feel a little welcome. I drink and sway. Rooms and bodies meld, form ghoulisish pillars and vague shapes out in the darkness and the thump. My eyes don't want to know. Words are out of sight and out of place. I'm stumbling away, hands like masks and my mouth is slack.

I take a piss and a fight erupts in the toilet. It's nothing to do with me so I just stare into the mirror. Such a strange sight in the flat surface. It looks just like here, but I can tell it isn't really anywhere and my concentration collapses as two men collide and there are shouts and screams and an eruption of senseless violence. Or maybe it's very sensible. I don't know. I just follow it outside and get a whiff of rising tensions. A guard slams a man to the ground and his friends burst out of their bodies in whirls of pride, making little fist parades and charging head-butt crashes. They're all cajoling one another in an orgy of self-destruction. A woman claws at a man's face and his bent knuckles crack across her head. The room begins to stink again, beyond the swirl of slurring hits and misses. I turn and see they're all still dancing, content and oblivious, under the silver lights of pure joy and happiness.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Luke Carman.