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Organ Pipes and Bodies with Organs: Listening to De Quincey's First Opium War Essays

Thomas De Quincey (1785–1859) is well known both for his opium habit and for his belligerent essays on the Opium Wars. The latter are generally seen as belonging to a hawkish imperialism, and to anxieties about the ‘Orient’ which are simultaneously anxieties about a self contaminated and co-constituted by foreign substances.¹ Some more recent criticism has sought either to temper our view of Romantic Orientalism by marginalising De Quincey—noting that his ‘paranoid visions’ of China are ‘unrepresentative’ of British Romanticism—or to soften our view of De Quincey himself, arguing, somewhat counterintuitively, that he is ‘a more sympathetic man’ than ‘first appears’ because he never genuinely imagined Chinese suffering, and regarded war with China in much the same way as he did the stylizations and irreality of Greek tragedy.² This article returns to De Quincey neither to praise him nor to bury his attitudes as merely ‘idiosyncratic’.³ Rather, it asks what his journalism on the First Opium War might reveal about the dense relationships between opium, empire, and sound in nineteenth-century Britain.

War and violence, imperial and otherwise, are prominent in sound studies. Yet the sonic dimensions of the Opium Wars remain largely unexplored.⁴ Sound and music are rarely mentioned in histories of the Opium Wars or opium itself.⁵ This may partly reflect the effects of opium, which can heighten aural sensitivity so that music becomes overwhelming or uninteresting.⁶ Yet opium’s highly diverse uses - consumed in different quantities, forms and contexts, interacting with different bodies and minds - discourage deterministic arguments about its sensory effects. Indeed, opium could be a tool of the trade for Chinese opera singers.⁷ Moreover, the circulation of opium in nineteenth-century culture and discourse - the intellectual life of opium, as well as its social life - involves sound in ways that include but go beyond discreet acts or even habits of listening.

De Quincey’s writing on the First Opium War (1839–1842) lays an intriguing weight on sound, implicitly linking sublime military noise with the oral discourse on and of war. One particularly vivid passage hints at Britain’s culpability in the ‘Opium Question’, something he elsewhere strenuously denies. It also represents China as a body without organs, an image I explore in

dialogue with Deleuze and Guattari. What does China's body have to do with sound, or with opium? I approach these questions by tracing the implications of two highly conventional tropes. The first is the organic - that is, organised - body, as its logic plays out for the individual, state, and in international relations. The second concerns the conflation of sound with violence, and by extension the ordered sounds of speech or music with the supposedly ordered violence of war (as in a 'war of words', or a volley 'answered' by one's enemy).⁸ Disorganised states, for De Quincey, lack functional organs, including the speaking organs of parliaments, embassies, the press and, *in extremis*, the military. For him, only military action really speaks to hollow or liquid states without organs such as China. The Opium War essays do not make explicit connections between different kinds of organ (and this article leaves to one side the place of musical organs within Chinese-European encounters from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries). Yet by turning to De Quincey's wider autobiographical and critical writings, the latter part of this article suggests, we can trace a surprisingly coherent logic for the organ, one linking body parts affected by opium to musical bodies and especially the pipe organ.

Before setting out, it is worth sketching some characteristics of the organ as musical instrument. The term 'pipe organ' highlights its status as a wind instrument associated with voices and vocal pipes, and with the cultural poetics of pipes as conduits and connectors: pipes often link the low with the high, or, in the case of smoking, different states of consciousness. While De Quincey called himself an opium-eater and typically drank his opium as laudanum, pipes were central to opium's rise in China from the eighteenth century, and important to its image in nineteenth-century Britain.⁹ Much like the often beautiful, elaborate, and costly opium pipe, the pipe organ was an aesthetic and representational object - a manifestation of power and technological prowess - and simultaneously an *instrument* for producing further effects.¹⁰ Construable as complex bodies with lungs (bellows), tongues (reeds), teeth (keys), and mouths (pipes), and often operated at a distance or from a hidden source (an organ loft), modern pipe organs coordinate manifold parts, mechanical and musical, in a way apt to suggest a mystified centralised power, whether governing spiritual or earthly empires.¹¹

LISTENING TO 'THE OPIUM AND THE CHINA QUESTION'

Spiritual and earthly empire are central to the substantial essay 'On the Opium and the China Question' and its 'Postscript' (*Blackwood's*, June 1840), published shortly after official

hostilities with China began. The pieces are highly-structured rhetorical exercises. De Quincey opens by positioning himself as a disinterested but knowledgeable interpreter of current affairs, hinting at his ‘experience’ with opium.¹² He will make a case for the Conservatives, opposing the Whig government’s China policy but advocating war *per se*. There follows a detailed review of the opium question, indicting the government, China (especially Lin Ze-xu, charged with suppressing the opium trade), and Charles Elliot (England’s representative for trade), rejecting both the righteousness of the Chinese in resisting opium, and the case for war on these grounds. He then argues for military intervention aimed at advancing and securing British imperial interests, moral and material, in China. He nods to the benefits to China, and the practicability of securing advantages against a state ‘full of error, full of insolence, needing to be enlightened’ (11.562). The ‘Postscript’ details the Tory Duke of Wellington’s similar pro-war arguments, and praises him as statesman, military leader, and national treasure.

The essays are not strewn with organs. Nonetheless, on one hand gesturing towards parliamentary debate - and claiming the right to respond to speakers in Westminster - and on the other hand dramatising the shadowy personal interactions between Elliot and Lin, the essays do prominently use oral forms: dialogue, colloquial addresses, personification, and exclamations. And frequent imagery with sonic implications - storms, explosions, thunderings, murmuring crowds - creates an implicit soundscape of Burkean sublime noises, commonly used to connect war and revolution, natural power, and political debate.¹³ Wellington’s parliamentary interventions are a case in point. They ‘tell like cannon-shot’ ‘[a]midst the sharp musketry of a Parliamentary debate’, ‘shattering *what* it reaches, and shattering that it *may* reach’ (11.564). De Quincey developed a model of communication as a series of sublime shocks in his autobiographical writings on the period surrounding the Napoleonic wars, discussed below. Shocks and reverberations here are ultimately salutary, indeed salvific, for the reminiscing individual and body politic, connecting and coordinating their parts, desirable even when they break some bones. By invoking Wellington, the Opium essays again look to the Napoleonic wars: the now elderly statesman is pictured as an ambassador at their end, ‘in a general congress of nations still rocking with the agitations of convulsions without a parallel’ (11.569–70). This imagery activates two further nineteenth-century discourses, one depicting revolution as an earthquake or volcano whose aftershocks work their way across the globe in unpredictable and unstoppable ways, and the other positioning wave-motions themselves as a primary form of movement, energy and event, shaping and permeating apparently solid bodies in the form of light, heat waves, ocean currents, magnetism, or sound. In this context, it seems

natural that Wellington's statements on China reverberate like canon-shot, and resonate with his role in an earlier war whose effects are still being felt - not least in helping to realign imperial powers and their trade in luxury goods and addictive substances, from tea and sugar to opium and opera.

Yet the essays draw war and oral debate still more closely together, so that the shocking noises of war merge with discourse on war. Thus De Quincey imagines British fears of Chinese ammunitions evaporating in the event of actual conflict: 'One discharge of a rocket brigade, should our expedition make a *hourrah* upon any great city, will be a sufficient reply to all such alarmists' (11.558). A 'hurrah' had long meant a cheer or shout; by 1840, it had recently come to designate an attack. De Quincey's spelling recalls Walter Scott's usages in his *Life of Napoleon* (1827), where *hourra* appears for the first time in this sense.¹⁴ The term, then, doubles as sonic and military. An amalgam of military attack and verbal discourse is in fact the essence of De Quincey's answer to the China question: Britain should embark on negotiations to protect its interests through military 'interference', staging an 'armed negotiation' (11.561, 554). Lacking 'civilisation', China needs 'a full explanation of our meaning under an adequate demonstration of our power': England's 'ambassadorial body' must be 'an armed body' (11.554, 558).

The tropes of the national body and of war/violence as speech converge pointedly in another passage repaying detailed discussion. De Quincey explains why the ordinary logic governing war does not apply to China. In Europe, implicitly, the war of all against all has been superseded by wars between bodies politic, governed by advancing international law. War becomes a public good, civilised and civilising, separate from private relationships and supposedly private enterprises like trade. Modern imperialism and colonialism clearly make this separation difficult to maintain, particularly with China. Military intervention cannot be justified purely as a response to upsets in British trade. But then China fails to play by the rules: it is the *Emperor* who has intervened in private trade, yet his military is so underdeveloped that Britain cannot target a Chinese navy as opposed to 'commercial shipping' in any 'reprisals' (11.542). This presents practical as well as ethical problems. National weakness and disorganisation paradoxically makes China less vulnerable to attack. China is not really a body politic at all:

The English navy might as reasonably throw bomb-shells into the crater of Vesuvius, by way of bidding it be quiet, or into the Kingdom of the Birds above us, as seek to make any deep impression upon such a vast callous hulk as the Chinese empire. It is defended by its essential non-irritability, arising out of the intense non-development of its resources; were it better developed, China would become an *organized* state, a *power* like Britain: at present it is an inorganic mass—something to be kicked, but which cannot kick again—having no commerce worth counting—no vast establishments of maritime industry—no arsenals—no shipbuilding towns—no Portsmouths, Deals, Deptfords, Woolwiches, Sunderlands, Newcastle, Liverpools, Bristols, Glasgows; in short, no vital parts—no organs—no heart—no lungs. As well deliver your broadsides against the impassive air; or, in Prospero’s words,

‘Stab the still closing waters
With all-bemock’d-at wounds.’

Two sound-related passages here bookend an account of the Chinese body politic that itself resonates with discourse on opium. China is first like a noisy volcano impervious to countersurges of humanly-made, and to that extent more organised, noise. Second, it is like a literal Celestial Kingdom, peopled by songbirds - creatures hopelessly mobile, and whose medium, the air, is invulnerable to weapons because they penetrate it too easily. (In China, unlike in Westminster, weapons and communications need not shatter to reach a goal, and similarly cannot shatter what they reach.) Third, moving beyond similes to metaphor, and in a transition between sonic and bodily imagery in the passage, China is an enormous hulk, a ship’s body stripped or emptied and potentially full of echoes.

At the end of the passage, after a pivoting reference to ‘lungs’, we return to unproductive militarised sound. Much like the ‘hourrah’, the ‘broadside’ mentioned is a blended discursive, sonic, and military object: broadsides can be cannonades, as well as a form of easily-disseminated news sung to popular tunes. The reference to Prospero reinforces the aural meaning of broadside, if indirectly. The lines paraphrased are, in fact, Ariel’s, but he is acting as Prospero’s mouthpiece, and so as a kind of miraculous aerial communication technology. Appearing with thunder and lightning as a winged harpy, Ariel upbraids the Duke and his followers as they fumble for their weapons:

You fools! I and my fellows
 Are ministers of Fate: the elements
 Of whom your swords are temper'd, may as well
 Wound the loud winds, or with bemock'd-at stabs
 Kill the still-closing waters, as diminish
 One dowle that's in my plume: my fellow-ministers
 Are like invulnerable. If you could hurt,
 Your swords are now too massy for your strengths,
 And will not be uplifted.¹⁵

In context, De Quincey's sequence, 'deliver broadsides to the air – stab the waters', becomes a variation on 'wound the loud winds – stab the waters'. The resonances of De Quincey's citation are significant, not least given their source in a play laced with portentous magic-natural and acousmatic sounds. Illusive yet truth-telling sounds can dominate characters' perceptions, so that Alonso tells Gonzalo at the scene's end, not that he has seen a harpy or any other figures, but that 'the billows spoke', 'The winds did sing it to me; and the thunder, / That deep and dreadful organ-pipe,' 'did bass my trespass.'¹⁶ So far so apt. But there is something out of place. Following De Quincey's parallel, it is the English who play the role of Shakespeare's 'men of sin', drawn to a foreign shore, by a ruler whom they have endangered, dispossessed, and usurped, and who now has at his disposal undreamt of powers of vengeance and resistance.¹⁷ Like Alonso's son, apparently 'bedded' 'i' th' ooze' in punishment for the Duke's transgression, the British merchants' cargo of opium has been sunk in retaliation for their illegal and immoral trade.¹⁸ The intoxicating effects of opium might even remind us of the effects of guilt in Shakespeare's play: at the close of the scene, the men of sin are observed running about in an 'ecstasy', driven by the 'great guilt' which 'Like poison [...] 'gins to bite the spirits'.¹⁹

This aural cue, like others in the essay, not only represents Britain's weird vulnerability to a weaker enemy, but also suggests a moral culpability otherwise strenuously denied. But what of the 'guts' of the passage, where China's uncanny-Oriental status as a deficient body politic develops into the grotesque image of a body without organs? The image calls to mind Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (*Mille Plateaux*, 1980), where the Body without Organs (BwO) was theorised alongside parallel constructs like 'Becoming-Musical' and 'the refrain' (*ritournelle*).²⁰ The refrain is the centre of music in *A Thousand Plateaus*. A primal music-

making gesture, it can be used in different ways: repeated apotropaically to ward off chaos; extended and developed to organise a space or home; or emancipated from stable organisations and territories and spun out in diagonal, ‘transversal’ lines.²¹ These last lines - ‘lines of flight’ or ‘deterritorializing’ refrains - seem to flout the ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ orderings of musical space (or of transcendent metaphysical schemas), and so become audible symbols of emancipation (345–51, 366–86). I return later to the refrain; for now, Deleuze and Guattari are valuable conversation partners because they make plain paradigmatic assumptions about the body. For them, as for De Quincey, organic bodies are crucially *organised*: they possess organs performing defined functions for the benefit of the whole, and connected hierarchically, obeying a centre or head. Such a view has special importance for De Quincey, whose later writings combine a Romantic view of nature as the unfolding of entities according to inherent principles, becoming increasingly organised and inter-related, with a conservative sensibility which, at least superficially, celebrates centralised power.

The term ‘organ’ is everywhere in De Quincey’s writings when it comes to naming the working parts of an entity, the ‘vital parts’ which constitute and manifest power. The ‘heart’, for instance, is the ‘organ’ that lends ‘man’ his greatest power to communicate with ‘the infinite’ (16.337), but a person *in toto* might become an ‘organ for conveying words from higher intelligences’ - at least according to ‘Turks’, who treat as oracular the ‘words of idiots’, creatures thought to become ‘tube[s] for conveying [...] inspiration’ (11.512). Meanwhile, the ancient Hebrew, unlike the Greek, was ‘dull and inert intellectually, but in his spiritual organs awake and sublime’ (17.59). This diagnosis rests on an appreciation of literary ‘style’ understood, not as ‘a trivial embellishment’ of language like ‘the arabesques of tea-urns’ (a casually Orientalising detail), but a ‘great organ of the advancing intellect’, a ‘tool’ performing crucial intellectual ‘functions’ (17.67). Appropriately, England’s ‘great social organ[s]’ include ‘literature’ (16.336), alongside whole professions and classes (16.324–5). Organs, as these examples suggest, move fluidly between several semantic domains: the physical body; individual moral and mental faculties; the racialised make-up of nations; and the social institutions shaping and expressing those nations’ powers. Frequently, organs concern utterances with particular sonic properties, and power is a matter of speaking or being silenced on a semi-theatrical social stage.

This is especially the case with musical organs. Figurative references to the pipe organ position it as a powerful tool (recalling its etymology in *organon*) with its own vital body parts. So

rhetoric is a ‘great organ of passion’, with an apocalyptic ‘trumpet-stop’ among its many registers (16.378). De Quincey elsewhere explains that in the enormous theatres of ancient Greece, ‘the unreverberated human voice would have been’ submerged in the ‘murmurs of the audience’, were it not for ‘the mechanism’ of the mask which ‘swell[ed] the intonations of the voice like the brazen tubes of an organ’ (11.492). The religious connotations of the organ are pertinent here (tarnished by pagan brazenness), as De Quincey is describing how various stylisations oriented Greek tragedy toward the sacred, ‘pointing [it], like the spires of our English parish churches, up to heaven’ and away from the purely human (11.492). Rather like the Christian’s heart, then, or the oracular organ tubes of Turkish imbeciles, these pipe organs work to amplify and to connect the terrestrial with the transcendent.

With their BwO, Deleuze and Guattari attempt to undermine just such organic thinking, whether it concerns the individual subject, the body politic, or discursive *corpora* and signification. The organic body is a social norm from which the BwO can offer liberation, not by eliminating organs, but by disrupting ‘that organization of the organs called the organism’, ‘the organic organization of the organs’ (184). The organism is effectively dependent on the BwO, constructed on and from this protean reality: it is ‘a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the BwO, imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences’ (184).

There are striking similarities between the BwO and De Quincey’s China.²² In its psychoanalytic origins, the BwO relates to a liquid (urethral) object. Unlike ‘normal’ early objects of desire, the liquid object dissolves desires. Its characteristics are fluidity, unstable formations, potentialities, becomings, and intensities rather than qualities or essences. Drawing on theories of prelinguistic infant development, Deleuze sometimes conceptualised the life of the BwO as a life of noise, of sound experienced as disorganised bodily impressions. The BwO does not draw distinctions or make connections in ways that would allow intensities to become bounded objects, and noises to become articulated communications (think of China as Vesuvius). Finally, the BwO at one unhealthy extreme can be associated with drugs: the liberatory BwO, like a ‘full egg’, is easily confused with the numbed ‘empty BwO of a drug addict, paranoiac, or hypochondriac’ (174, 190) (think of China as empty hulk).

Denied access to China's interior, De Quincey's Britain in many ways encounters a liquid empire: a stretch of coastline, rivers, a somewhat amorphous band of water (11.540–1). Nineteenth-century British art often connected Canton with Venice, a *locus classicus* of liquefaction and decay.²³ De Quincey's imagined glimpses of China's interior also suggest a liquidity of physical and economic disorganisation. Wealth production, he argues, grows from an economically mobilised population, connected in its productive and consuming functions so that 'surplus' logically arises from 'consumption'. 'But upon a vast body of the Chinese, living on rivers, and eating the garbage rejected by the meanest of the comfortable classes [...], no surplus at all arises' (11.547). For readers of *A Thousand Plateaus*, it is perhaps difficult to read this vision of an unseen and unreachable body of garbage-eating river-dwellers without recalling its figures of waste: 'You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it [...] it is a limit [...]. But you're already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic [...]. On it we sleep, live our waking lives, fight' (166). Like the BwO, China is also a field of potentialities, not essentially and stably unproductive, but unproductive because 'the intense non-development of its resources' keeps it from 'becom[ing] an *organized* state'.

Do these parallels extend from China's status as a body incapable of undertaking healthy international wars and trade—issues surrounding the opium question—to opium consumption itself? De Quincey initially assumes fairly direct relationships between individual and national bodies. Discussing China's attempts to suppress opium, he explains that the drug is held to be a 'luxury' 'pressing upon the general health' and 'national energies' (11.534). He dutifully acknowledges that 'all unwholesome luxuries' affect individual users' 'cheerfulness and industry', and that opium especially 'speedily induces a deadly torpor and disrelish of all exertion' even 'before the health is deranged' (11.534–5). We could see the Chinese body without organs, then, as an addicted body, drained of desire, vaporising its desires in opium pipes or, at the state level, fruitlessly dissolving them in the irrational destruction of British opium. The idea is inviting, not least because what China is held to lack most is desire or will power, a national spirit to encourage the state's organic unification, and press beyond this into colonial expansion. China thereby becomes the perfect foil for Britain:

Now, what we are in the very supreme degree, that is China in the lowest. We are the least defended by massy concentration—she the most so. We have the colonial instinct in the strongest degree—China the lowest. With us the

impulses of expatriation are almost morbid in their activity—in China they are undoubtedly morbid in their torpor. (11.545)

Being ‘so inorganic’, China not only lacks internal organs, but cannot recognise its kinship with subjects who leave its borders. China therefore cannot support external trading centres, and colonies would become nothing ‘other than a degraded limb of the Chinese state’ (11.545).

Britain, by contrast, is ‘propell[ed]’ in a ‘great Asiatic career’ by ‘clamorous instincts’ (literally *crying-out*), its subjects suffused with ‘constitutional energy’ (11.560, 11.545). The ‘mighty mother in Europe’, England spawns well-organised children capable of ‘*scatter[ing] and diffus[ing themselves] in society*’ without losing their organic integrity and connections to the mother country (11.545). Indeed, the viability of the nation/species is demonstrated by her offspring’s capacity to reproduce, and increase their own interconnections (11.552–3). England is, implicitly, the ultimate body *with* organs: the ever-pregnant magna mater who is more organised than your average body, since a late-term pregnant body contains at least twice as many organs as usual (or more, with multiple gestations). Her reproductive health and energy are the antithesis of a torpid, inorganic, drugged BwO.²⁴

Nonetheless, the parallel between the opium addict and Chinese BwO is imperfect. First, it rests on a premise De Quincey otherwise rejects, that the Chinese population really is habituated to opium. In fact, he argues (erroneously) that the number of Chinese addicts must be relatively insignificant, as the drug is too expensive and enervating to be a blight on the working classes.²⁵ If the upper classes indulge in opium, this cannot affect the ‘national energies’ and warrant its suppression, even were it possible to control the leisured elite. Here, the simple synecdoche between individual and national health is dismissed, along with the very idea of an opiated population: whether thinking rhetorically or statistically, China cannot be an addicted body. The parallel is undermined, second, by De Quincey’s fame as an opium-eater. With this in mind, his admission that opium incapacitates its users seems somewhat disingenuous. Readers might recall his albeit ambivalent defences of opium in the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), and the essay itself demonstrates an opium-eater’s ability to produce boisterous, well-ordered journalism quickly enough to contribute to topical debate. Perhaps, then, opium can belong to an individual body with organs, and an organic empire like Britain with its substantial support of opium plantations and trade.

I suggest in the following that China's opium-tainted body is indeed constitutively and conveniently different to the English opium-eater's delicately organised body. This speculative argument picks up the *Confessions*' diagnosis of a terrifying abyss separating China and Britain - a 'barrier of utter abhorrence and want of sympathy' (2.70) - and its suggestion that music and opium work differently on Turkish and English bodies. In each case, the constitution of an 'Oriental' body separates it from an English one, even under the influence of an oriental drug. This racial and cultural distinction opens up a domesticated, if still risky, space for opium habituation, experimentation, and exploitation.

OPIMUM AND ORGANS OF IMAGINATION

How does opium affect the organism? For De Quincey, as for Deleuze and Guattari, the logic of the organic body no longer holds under the influence of narcotics. All are ambivalent about drug use: the theorists show addiction creating failed BwOs, yet they are reluctant to relinquish the countercultural promise of liberational intoxication (190–2). For De Quincey, opium, for better and worse, makes organs which are enervated (digestive and motor functions stagnate), deranged, or overactive, released from normal functions. The semi-literal 'dreaming organ' is the overactive body part at the centre of his opium writings. According to the autobiographical *Suspiria de profundis* (1845), 'in connection with the heart, the eye and the ear', it forms a 'machinery for dreaming' which acts as 'the one great tube through which man communicates with the shadowy'; the dreaming tube connects man to 'eternities below all life' (15.130). Opium strengthens the capacity to dream, a power injured by the pace of modern life, or, in his equivocating account, by a 'weakness in one [of his] organ[s]' caused by childhood suffering (15.131). This passage's imagery is primarily visual, yet the proximity of an 'organ' to a 'tube' creates a faint echo of the aural imagery elsewhere representing communication with infinities above or below us. Tellingly, the passage is closely echoed by an 1854 addition to the essay 'War' (1848): 'War has a deeper and more ineffable relation to hidden grandeurs in man'; only war 'keeps open in man a spiracle - an organ of respiration - for breathing a transcendent atmosphere'.²⁶ War and opium-dreaming, then, are analogous sources of moral renewal (no wonder an opium war held appeal), and both gesture towards organs of inspiration or respiration, organs *for* or *filled with* breath.

Opium also unnaturally heightens the machinery for musical listening. According to a scene in *Confessions* narrating his visits to the opera, music is not heard ‘passive[ly]’, but created ‘by the reaction of the mind upon the notices of the ear (the *matter* coming by the senses, the *form* by the mind) [...]’. Now opium, by greatly increasing the activity of the mind, generally increases, of necessity, ‘the power ‘to construct out of the raw material of organic sound an elaborate intellectual pleasure.’ (2.48) There is a crucial exception, however, for ‘Turk[ish]’ ‘opium-eaters’. Turks are not ‘capable of any pleasures approaching to the intellectual ones of an Englishman. For music is an intellectual or a sensual pleasure, according to the temperament of him who hears it.’ (2.48) This seems contradictory: music is always intellectual - music is intellectual or sensual; opium necessarily increases mental activity - opium pleases ‘torpid’ imbeciles. The vacillations become more intelligible if the basic workings of acculturated bodies differ between West and East: if the Turkish body, like the Chinese body politic, is not properly organic.

This implies a racialised theory of Romantic imagination - imagination being the theory under which perceptions of music and dreaming are usefully grouped, in that both work by connecting and organising parts into an integrated or ‘organic’ whole. This lends a significant reflexive dimension to the logic of opium consumption and the organic processes it triggers. Imagination moves and connects parts into a whole; opium expands imagination’s proper space among the faculties, dis- or re-organising the whole. Under its effects the imagination expands (and often distorts and exaggerates) its work of connecting and organising material.

Organisation is foregrounded at the opera, where De Quincey constructs a musical whole from the disparate matter meeting his ears. He also joins ‘foreign’ discursive materials, connecting opium-eating with the English touchstones of Shakespeare, Sir Thomas Browne, and the King’s Theatre, but also an Italian opera-singer, her role as a Grecian heroine, music’s resembling of a ‘collection of Arabic characters’, and the musical voices of ‘Indian women’ heard by travellers to Canada. The scene culminates in an experience of subjective unity, with his ‘whole’ ‘past life’ ‘displayed’ as if in a synchronic tapestry before him, its ‘incident[s]’ ‘blended’ together (2.48). Scenarios of unification and organisation often become excessive and even terrifying with De Quincey, and sound, again, repeatedly features in scenes of over-connection. Emblematic is his complaint in *Suspiria* about memory’s propensity to re-present and re-organise things long past, particularly words heard unconsciously or imperfectly understood. ‘Said but once, said but softly,’ words reappear, congregate, and ‘arrange

themselves gradually into sentences' as he lies awake (15.153). He thus relives, and reinterprets, the agonising funeral service for his sister, Elizabeth, heard as a child. It included the Funeral Sentences, 'I heard a voice from heaven', which, he avers, should always 'be sung, and by the full choir' (15.154). Like musical listening in general, and like dreaming, memory makes connections. Its involuntary 'aptitude for seizing' upon similarities shoots the autobiographer 'like lightning from one topic to another'. He passes between 'aerial pontoons', a mobile agent circulating at speed across an open expanse (15.153). The vision is worthy of high modern imaginings of acceleration and global mobility.²⁷ But for De Quincey this subjecthood is already a source of 'distress[]' and 'mortifications', resembling the agitated experience of the passenger conveyed at speed around the nation in his most celebrated reflection on circulation, *The English Mail-Coach, or The Glory of Motion* (1849).

The *Mail-Coach* brings us to De Quincey's extended representations of pipe organs, where the instrument again commonly functions to organize and connect. In De Quincey's youth, the opening pages explain, the mail-coach was 'the national organ for publishing' the glorious 'events' of the Napoleonic wars (16.409). Just as the body politic speaks through parliaments, embassies, and armies, it communicates internally through this nerve-like news system. The mail's centralised organisation exerts a fascination over the narrator's 'subsequent dreams': it conveyed a 'conscious presence of a central intellect, that [...] overruled all obstacles' - 'vast distances', 'darkness', 'storms' - 'into one steady co-operation in a national result.' Sound figures this organisation:

this Post-office service recalled some mighty orchestra, where a thousand instruments, all disregarding each other, and [...] in danger of discord, yet all obedient as slaves to the supreme *baton* of some great leader, terminate in a perfection of harmony like that of heart, veins, and arteries, in a healthy animal organization. (16.409)

Musical vocabulary reappears in the text's final section, where the logic of the national body also reaches its apogee. A 'Dream-Fugue' on the 'Theme of Sudden Death' (16.442) culminates in an apocalyptic vision of the impending sacrifice and redemption of an unnamed maiden, solemnised by liturgies of choirs and organ. Endangered by the onward-rushing coach, this female figure brings home a point assumed by the China essays, that a finely organised body is a vulnerable one, where a blow struck to part of one organ (say, a soldier) reverberates dangerously with all the others (his mother, family, nation).

As the mail-coach races through an enormous cathedral, ‘the aërial galleries of the organ and the choir’ signal an approach towards the high altar, and an intensification in the dream’s liturgical logic (16.446). A glimpse of the altar is then heralded by a crescendo of all-pervasive sound:

Then rose the agitation, spreading through the infinite cathedral, to its agony; then was completed the passion of the mighty fugue. The golden tubes of the organ, which as yet had but sobbed and muttered at intervals—gleaming amongst clouds and surges of incense—threw up, as from fountains unfathomable, columns of heart-shattering music (16.448).

The music of the partially-obscured organ is troped here as a climax of organised complexity (epitomised by the fugue); as personified, vocal passion (sobbing and muttering); and as expressing power through overwhelming movement from ‘unfathomable’ depth to height. In these respects, it belongs to the organised yet frenzied movement of sacralised, militarised bodies in the passage (‘columns’ suggest simultaneously the impression of sonic structures, the organ’s architecture, and troop formations). This is the pipe organ weaponised. The passage dramatises the irresistible integration of England’s part in a particular violent conflict into a universal schema of war which, for all its uncertainties and agonies, is soteriological and providential.²⁸ Organicism governs the coordination of multitudinous sounds, bodies, nations, and wars, gathering up the Napoleonic-era mail-coach into the exhilarated affect and speed of a universal advance of Christendom (the Body of Christ) comprehending warriors and unknowns, ‘the quick and the dead’, ‘children of the choir’ and ‘children of the grave’. ‘Like armies’, they ‘moved with one step’, ‘overpower[ing]’ the narrator’s coach: ‘As brothers we moved together; to the skies we rose’ (16.449).

The *Mail-Coach* typifies De Quincey’s uses of pipe organs to construct channels between low and lofty, finite and infinite. Similar scenes occur in his first opium dreams in *Confessions*, and in *Suspiria*’s childhood reminiscences, where the church organ ‘threw its vast columns of sound, fierce yet melodious, over the [...] choir’, ‘gathering’ musical ‘strife’ ‘into unity’, and allowing the grieving narrator to use ‘grief itself as a fiery chariot for mounting victoriously above the causes of grief’ (15.170). The organ performs a sublime theodicy here. It renders audible evil’s harmonising and elevating effects, as an occasion for organising warring parts

into a whole. What organ music does for the mourner, we might say, opium does for the modern dreamer, and war for the organic nation.

Some pipe organs, however, apparently work differently, emphasising less ascent than a digressive mobility, ricocheting around corners and across time. These organs explicitly concern imagination - unsurprisingly, given the highly-developed practice of liturgical organ improvisation. Improvisation, De Quincey reflects in an 1852 review, ‘force[s]’ one ‘into a consciousness of creative energies’, generating ‘flying arabesques’ like those in his own improvisatory reviews (17.148). Another essay likens organ-playing to conversation, celebrating this aural practice’s transience, speed, and mobility:

Great organists find the same effect of inspiration, the same result of power creative and revealing, in the mere movement and velocity of their own voluntaries, like the heavenly wheels of Milton, throwing off fiery flakes and bickering flames; these *impromptu* torrents of music create rapturous *fioriture*, beyond all capacity in the artist to register, or afterwards to imitate. (16.218)

The speed of organ improvisation, much like darkness and oncoming sleep in *Suspiria*’s nocturnal reveries, loosens conscious control and unleashes creative or recreative imagination.

It is tempting to imagine such improvisation escaping the hierarchical and totalizing logic of organicism—perhaps even offering escapes of the kind that Deleuze and Guattari, in their theorising of refrains, call ‘lines of flight’, ‘deterritorializing’ lines that break free from ‘territorializing’ uses of musical themes. Yet this conclusion would be premature: ‘flying arabesques’ merely ‘reveal’ more aspects of a world already organized by similarities, an ordered cosmos of violently-spinning ‘heavenly wheels’. Again, like involuntary compositions in *Suspiria*, improvisations discover connections: the conversationalists’ ‘sympathy with the object discussed’, and with each other, offers ‘revelations of affinity, suggestion, relation, analogy, that could not have been approached through [...] methodical study’ (16.218). Improvisatory organs again prove compatible with (Burkean) national expansion and progress (16.218–9). Moreover, they appear in close proximity to painful memories and dreams elsewhere associated with excessive connection. In the 1852 essay, the review’s subject triggers just such a painful memory, prompting the melo-dramatic reflection: ‘sound but for a moment one bar of preparation, and immediately the pomps and glory of [...] life re-awaken

for torment; the orchestras of the earth open [...]; and in a moment I behold, [...] passing over sad phantom stages, all that chiefly I have loved' (17.146).

De Quincey's improvisatory organs, we could say, resemble but undermine the model of 'deterritorializing' refrains. In this, they resonate with the dangers Deleuze and Guattari imagine for music. *A Thousand Plateaus* diagnoses strong potential for 'lines of flight' to simply reach into and incorporate new territory, to be 're-territorializing' rather than subversive, saying: *you thought this space was free and foreign to me, but this is mine, too, and so is this, and so is this*. This is musical power in a mode the theorists call 'fascist' (348–405), drawing on the connections troubling many commentators between Wagner and other high Romantic composers - deeply involved in motivic development - and German fascism.²⁹ The refrain's 'fascist' potential parallels one of two key dangers for the BwO: a 'botched' attempt to create a BwO that issues in a 'fascist' or 'cancerous' body (190–2). Here, the destabilisation of the organism becomes a prompt for renewed, aggressive, and overactive growth by organising structures, as when the reproductive powers of cells are turned against the body. The other key 'botching' of the BwO we know already: the too-radical emptying out or liquefaction of an organism that produces 'the empty BwO of a drug addict' (190).

These are suggestive alternatives for thinking with De Quincey. Clearly, he was deeply concerned with the botching of the body *with* organs in its many registers (textual, individual, national). Organic defects unite and separate the Chinese and English, and shape their responses to opium. China misses the organs which should first separate, and then connect, the powers of nation and satellite, production and consumption, civic commerce and state might. The English are liable to suffer from massed connections: their impulse to emigrate while remaining linked to the Mother Country - a recipe for connectivity - is 'almost morbid', as is the propensity of their most sensitive members to wild mental travel between over-connected topics and memories. If China to De Quincey resembles an enervated, empty, drugged BwO, then the English Opium-Eater himself seems threatened not only with the vulnerabilities to which finely-tuned organisms are always susceptible, but also to the excesses of organization *per se* that Deleuze and Guattari cast in terms of the ultimate bodily and political horrors for the post-1945 collective psyche: a cancerous body piping fascist melodies.

CONCLUSION

The venerable figure of the organic body was central to imagining opium and the opium wars in Britain. To trace the movement of organs in De Quincey's writings - on continuums between the physical and mental-moral, the individual and national - is to witness a particularly agile play with conventional registers of the bodily. The contortions of his language in accounts of the British and Chinese empires points towards the image of global empire as a body which would become popular later in the century - with far-flung territories forming a single 'organism', given 'a new circulation' by 'steam', 'and a new nervous system' by 'electricity'.³⁰ The prominence of sound and *musical organs* is more surprising, until we recognise that bodies politic are for him centrally speaking and listening bodies. Since, alongside parliaments, embassies, mail-packets, and armies, the organs of the press for which De Quincey writes are mouthpieces of the nation, his China essays can be imagined as themselves part of a campaign both oral and violent. Organs in the form of pipes have a distinctive place within this schema, functioning as conduits, amplifiers, and connectors. In this context it seems not coincidental that China's appearance as a body without organs is flanked by references to unintelligible or disorganised sounds. We might even sense a logic to the way English guilt is hinted at through allusions to sound: a highly-organised body like that of the English essay writer, or English mail-coach service, is vulnerable to making utterances which reverberate around its system in unintended ways.

Finally, this article has charted unexpected affinities between De Quincey and Deleuze and Guattari. Coming from opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of the desirability of the organism, each suggests the precarious and dangerous status not only of a perfectly organic body, but also of bodies without organs. It is easy to forget, reading some celebrations, that the BwO became a highly qualified limit concept for Deleuze and Guattari, not only because limits and impossibilities are *de rigueur*, and because achieved objectives might be 'fascist' or 'bourgeois', but also because *A Thousand Plateaus* recognizes that dismantling organising systems can be unpredictable and damaging. We might speculate that similarities between the ostensibly politically conservative De Quincey and radically leftist French theorists stem from an acute awareness of the attraction and dangers of open revolt, forged in a context of failed revolutions (the French Revolution, or 1968). The line between subverting and supporting norms becomes increasingly blurry in such post-revolutionary orders. Indeed, some of *A Thousand Plateaus'* recommendations for constructing a BwO resemble recipes for liberal expansionism, or identity-formation by individualist consumers and careerists: 'experiment[]

with the opportunities' of your situation, they advise, 'find an advantageous place, find potential movements of deterritorialisation, possible lines of flight [...] have a small plot of new land at all times' (187).³¹ Undermining organicism is a private, nocturnal matter: 'keep enough of the organism to reform each dawn'; 'keep small supplies of significance and subjectification [...] to respond to the dominant reality' (186). Experiments with the BwO demand 'caution', 'since overdose is a danger' (185). The privatist or escapist subjecthood hinted at sounds not unlike De Quincey's idyll of early drug-experimentation in the *Confessions*: softly subversive, set at the quiet space of the tea-table, decanter of laudanum to hand, an imaginative world to travel through in the night, cushioned by the chiaroscuro of a noisy world outside ('the wind and rain [...] raging audibly without' (2.59)), supported by the structures of empire and trade. This is a reminder, if one were needed, of the extent to which postmodern reactions against the habits of the long nineteenth century continue to replay that era's debates.

1 Cannon Schmitt, 'Narrating National Addictions: De Quincey, Opium, and Tea,' in Janet Farrell Brodie and Marc Redfield (eds), *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction* (Berkeley, 2002), pp. 79–84; Barry Milligan, *Pleasures and Pains: Opium and the Orient in 19th-Century British Culture* (Charlottesville, 1995), pp. 19–21; Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 208–28; John Barrell, *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven, 1991), pp. 147–56; Robert Maniquis, *Lonely Empires: Personal and Public Visions of Thomas De Quincey* (Madison, 1976), pp. 96–106.

2 Peter Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange, 1760–1840* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 12–13, 234; Chris Murray, 'Greeks on De Quincey's Chinese Stage: Orientalism, Opium Warfare, and the "Theory of Greek Tragedy",' *Classical Reception Journal* 7:3 (2015), p. 331.

3 Kitson, *Forging*, p. 12.

4 An exception is Ashley Thorpe, *Performing China on the London Stage: Chinese Opera and Global Power, 1759–2008* (London, 2016). Thorpe takes the wars as landmarks in changing Sino-British relationships, drawing on earlier studies of theatre which treat sound in passing: Ross Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (Cambridge, 2013), ch. 5; Kitson, *Forging*, ch. 8; Dongshin Chang, *Representing China on the Historical London Stage: From Orientalism to Intercultural Performance* (New York, 2015). On war and sound elsewhere in the nineteenth century, see recently Gavin Williams (ed.), *Hearing the Crimean War: Wartime Sound and the Unmaking of Sense* (Oxford, 2019).

5 Several studies of De Quincey, however, connect music and opium. Miranda Stanyon, 'Musical Sublimes in English and German Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century', PhD dissertation, Queen Mary, 2014, ch. 6; Charles Rzepka, "'A Deafening Menace in Tempestuous Uproars': De Quincey's 1856 *Confessions*, the Indian Mutiny, and the Response of Collins and Dickens', in Robert Morrison and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts (eds), *Thomas De Quincey: New Theoretical and Critical Directions* (London, 2008); Phyllis Weliver, 'Tom-Toms, Dream-Fugues and Poppy Juice: East Meets West in Nineteenth-Century Fiction', in Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon (eds), *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780–1940s: Portrayal of the East* (Aldershot, 2007); Daniel O'Quinn, 'Ravishment Twice Weekly: De Quincey's Opera Pleasures', *Romanticism on the Net* 34–5 (2004); Grevel Lindop, 'De Quincey's "Immortal Druggist" and Wordsworth's "Power of Music",' *Notes and Queries* 41:3 (1994).

6 Doris Buddenberg and Jan Burkamp presented the argument in 'Opium Soundscapes', Opium Workshop, King's College London, 9–10 December 2016.

7 Peter Lee, *Opium Culture: The Art and Ritual of the Chinese Tradition* (Rochester, Vermont, 2006), pp. 84, 129.

8 Song-Chuan Chen, *Merchants of War and Peace: British Knowledge of China in the Making of the Opium War* (Hong Kong, 2017), pp. ix, viii. Elliot described volleys answering volleys in relating the first shots in the Opium War.

9 See Yangwen Zheng, *The Social Life of Opium in China* (Cambridge, 2005); Julia Lovell, *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China* (London, 2011), pp. 22–23.

10 Compare the distinction between kinds of instruments in Flora Willson, ‘Hearing Things: Musical Objects at the 1851 Great Exhibition,’ in James Davies and Ellen Lockhart (eds), *Sound Knowledge: Music and Science in London, 1789–1851* (Chicago, 2017), p. 235. The organ remained prominent in displays of national industry like the Great Exhibition, if subordinate to the piano, that ‘resonant cipher[] for modernity’ (p. 236).

11 These symbolic features resonate strongly in the organ’s reception in China. See David Urrows, ‘The Wind Qin: Hearing and Reading Chinese Reactions to the Pipe Organ’, in Song Gang (ed.), *Reshaping the Boundaries: The Christian Intersection of China and the West in the Modern Era* (Hong Kong, 2016), pp. 48–58.

12 Grevel Lindop (general ed.), *The Works of Thomas De Quincey* (London, 2000–2003), vol. 11, ed. Julian North, p. 533. All quotations from De Quincey are given with volume and page numbers from this edition.

13 Compare Chris Reid, ‘Burke as Rhetorician and Orator,’ in David Dwan and Christopher Insole (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 46.

14 OED, ‘hurrah’, B2.

15 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, in W. J. Craig (ed.), *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (London, repr. 1964), III.iii.60–68.

16 *Ibid.*, III.iii.96–99.

17 *Ibid.*, III.iii.53.

18 *Ibid.*, III.iii.100.

19 *Ibid.*, III.iii.108, 104–6.

20 *Ritournelle* is better glossed as *tune*, *motif*, or *theme* than *refrain* in the sense of an unvarying chorus or *ritornello*.

21 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London, 2013), pp. 345, 362–3. Page numbers follow in-text. De Quincey largely favoured music Deleuzians would term ‘territorializing’ or ‘reterritorializing’, especially Rossinian opera. Compare Christoph Cox, ‘Wie wird Musik zu einem organlosen Körper? Gilles Deleuze und experimentale Elektronika,’ in Marcus Kleiner and Achim Szepanski (eds), *Soundcultures: über digitale und elektronische Musik* (Frankfurt, 2006).

22 Similarities cannot be pressed too hard, as the BwO is a mutable concept as well as a figure of mutability.

23 Geoff Quilley, ‘British Art, Empire, and the Opium War: The View from Dent’s Veranda’, Opium Workshop, King’s College London, 9–10 December 2016.

24 Nonetheless, Victorian bodies could give birth *and* be on drugs – the Opium Wars coincided with debate over chloroform’s use during labour. De Quincey wrote in its favour several years before its use by Queen Victoria (16.502–10).

25 John Barrow’s generally disparaging *Travels in China* (London, 1804), pp. 152–3, suggested the lower orders avoided all intoxicants. On Barrow, see Kitson, *Forging*, pp. 153–20. For opium as a working-class drug, see Zheng, *Social Life*, ch. 6.

26 The universalising argument hits its limits with inorganic civilizations; ‘our wars with the Chinese’ cannot ‘teach those semi-barbarous peoples to fight’ (16.708).

27 Compare Duncan Bell's astute observation that '[t]oday's language of globalization [...] often simply replicates [...] late Victorian[] interpret[at]ions of] the dynamics of global politics.' *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton, 2007), p. 84.

28 Compare Robert Hopkins, 'De Quincey on War and the Pastoral Design of "The English Mail-Coach",' *Studies in Romanticism* 6:3 (1967).

29 On fascism, see Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal, 2007), pp. 157–174.

30 John Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (1883), pp. 74–5, discussed in Bell, *Idea of Greater Britain*, p. 83.

31 Thus Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (London, 2012), pp. 161–63, complains that Deleuze became 'the ideologist of late capitalism', a theorist for 'yuppies'.