Staging De Quincey: Soundscape and Literary Language in Tess de Quincey's *Ghost Quarters*

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A door opens partially, and a hand appears, then a face, blurred in the half-light. The advancing figure makes its entrance with a slow fluidity that suggests ectoplasm, and in fact this is not a physical entity. It hovers in space for a few seconds, semi-transparent, before dematerialising, along with the traces of the portal through which it just passed. Then, as the light grows and the eye discovers more of the surrounding space, another figure is revealed, with the same aura of pale hair surrounding the upturned face—but this is a gravity-bound presence, and as it rises from the floor, its movements are a confusion of impulses. It is quite literally finding its feet.

Its voice is scattered in all directions, coming across as a semi-audible hubbub of mismatched speech patterns, but as the figure gains balance and orientation, some fragments of narrative emerge. They are about setting out on a journey, inhaling mountain air, associating with the eternal motion of winds and rivers. Green grasses float in projected images around the now rapidly moving figure. It becomes evident that the airs are a little too intoxicating. There is a sense that the person in the midst of all this is hyperventilating as the words "fiery rapture" are repeated over and over. The scene darkens. Exhilaration converts to anxiety on the same panting rhythms of breath, and the voice starts to rehearse complaints about severe weather and nights out on the exposed hillside.

Now we are entering another kind of environment: the built environment of nineteenth-century London, where the wanderer takes refuge in a large vacant house—vacant, that is, except for an abandoned child, and the ghosts who are permanent residents. The exterior of the house is conjured into the space, its windows floating as transparent shapes, at odd angles.

The opening sequence of *Ghost Quarters*, a solo performance work drawn from the writings of the early-nineteenth-century essayist Thomas De Quincey, is an exploration of the spatial uncanny. De Quincey ran away from school at the age of sixteen, and lived rough in the Welsh hills for several months before "throwing himself upon London" in a state of complete destitution. Since opium was cheaper than food, and a means of calming the hunger pangs, this period of his life also

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led De Quincey to addiction, and a hallucinatory fascination with architecture as wilderness. The experience left with him an estranged relationship to domestic space. In his writings, perceptions of interior and exterior are confused, walls are never stable, and any doorway is an invitation to murderous intruders.

Here we found common ground between the work of De Quincey, the nineteenth-century literary gentlemen, and that of his descendant Tess de Quincey, a contemporary performer whose formative training is in the Japanese practice of Body Weather. In Body Weather, as the term implies, biological life is conceived of as an environment in a state of elemental flux that reflects the changing weathers of the world at large. A continuing dialogue between microcosm and macrocosm, with a focus on the evolving role of consciousness in unstable conditions, is central to the forms of intelligence cultivated by the English Romantic Movement. Thomas De Quincey's cultural milieu is not such strange terrain, then, even for someone proposing to interpret it through the lenses of an Asian discipline, and the nonverbal art form of Body Weather.[1]

Ghost Quarters was performed in May 2009 at Carriageworks in Sydney, Australia. This massive industrial setting, with towering brick walls that once enclosed a railway workshop whose iron tracks are still embedded in the concrete floors, presented first and foremost a challenge of scale. De Quincey's fascination with Piranesi (whose drawings he did not see, but knew of through Coleridge's description) was an obvious reference point, and a Piranesi-like *mise-en-abyme* of industrial structures was projected onto gauze screens hung through the centre of the performance arena. As these were transparent to light, an image projected onto one became multiplied through the others at slightly altered scales and angles.

This performance was the second in a series of multimedia presentations based on De Quincey's writings, an experiment with the overarching title of *The Opium Confessions.* The primary aim of the project was to find a dynamic way of realising De Quincey's visionary and expansive sense of the human mind for audiences in our own time. As writer and sound designer on the project, the authors of this paper worked closely with video artist Sam James, lighting designer Travis Hodgson, and performer Tess de Quincey to create an aesthetic that would be suggestive of Thomas De Quincey's mannered style and extravagant sense of atmosphere. Inevitably, the pivotal factor in this was the figure of the performer, and strategies by which the ancestral De Quincey's physical presence was to be evoked.

1 For more on Body Weather see: *About Performance* no. 5 (McAuley 2003); Grant and de Quincey (2006); Marshall (2006); Taylor (2010); Anderson (2014); Fraser (2014); Fuller (2014); Robertson (2015); and Hug (2016).

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The Two De Quinceys

> He was a pretty little creature, full of wire-drawn ingenuities; bankrupt enthusiasms, bankrupt pride; with the finest silver-toned low voice, and most elaborate gently-winding courtesies and ingenuities of conversation. [...] A bright, ready and melodious talker. One of the smallest man figures I ever saw; shaped like a pair of tongs; and hardly above five feet in all: when he sat, you would have taken him, by candlelight, for the beautifullest little child; blue eyed, blond haired, sparkling face—had there not been something too, which said, "this Child has been in hell." (Carlyle in Sackville West 1974, 193-194)

This is how Thomas Carlyle described Thomas De Quincey, whom he met in 1826, when De Quincey was in early middle age and had gained some celebrity as the author of *Confessions of an Opium Eater*. The exquisite verbal sketch provided a touchstone for Tess de Quincey's evocation of him in performance.

Although the family connection has not been formally confirmed, the resemblance between the two De Quinceys is striking. A video installation by Mayu Kanamori in the foyer of Carriageworks during the run of *Ghost Quarters* superimposed photographs of Tess de Quincey and her father over the portrait of Thomas De Quincey painted by Sir John Watson Gordon in 1846.

Figure 1: Tess de Quincey in *Ghost Quarters*, Carriageworks, Sydney, May 2009. Photo by Mayu Kanamori.

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As the three images morph into one another in a continuous weave, there is something in the set of the eyes and forehead that is astonishingly consistent, but this photographic resemblance is secondary to other kinds of physiological echoes better captured in Carlyle's description. Some of his phrases would not be appropriately applied to a woman of the twenty-first century, but there are striking resonances: the "wire-drawn ingenuities," low-toned lightness of the voice, bodily compactness, blond hair and blue eyes, and, above all, the face uncannily suggestive of a child who has seen and known more than most adults would dare to contemplate. Neither in Tess nor in Thomas, though, is there any suggestion of the childlike looks and manner cultivated by those in the business of seductive charm. It has nothing to do with cuteness. Rather, they have in common a kind of sensory directness that seems unfiltered by adult self-consciousness, a way of looking on the world as if it were filled with unpredictability.

If there is something childlike in the sensory directness Tess and Thomas De Quincey have in common, they also share a highly sophisticated consciousness of technique as a communicator. Thomas De Quincey's satirical manipulation of language has direct parallels with Tess de Quincey's approach to the language of movement.

Words in Space

Confessions of an English Opium Eater, first published in 1821, and *Suspiria de Profundis*, a sequel which appeared in 1845 when *Confessions* was in its fifth edition, are autobiographical reflections on the preconditions for opium addiction and the hallucinatory activity of the mind under its influence. Thematically distinct from these are a collection of essays and occasional writings on the subject of murder: two pseudo-lectures "On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts" (the first published in 1827 and the second in 1839); a "Postscript" to these (1854); a story entitled "The Avenger"; and a short article "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*."[2] Our decision to focus on these works was taken only after some determined encounters with the larger terrain of De Quincey's *oeuvre*, which in Grevel Lindop's definitive edition runs to twenty-one volumes. Tess de Quincey arrived on the first day of our studio residency with the entire set in a shopping trolley. We don't claim to have read them in their entirety, but we raided them, sometimes randomly, sometimes with a dogged determination to track a particular image or idea in all its permutations. They remained with us throughout the working process, as a resource to be mined for further images and narratives, and as a reminder of the limits we must necessarily impose on our engagement.

2 The most widely available current editions are the Penguin anthology, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and other Writings*, edited by Barry Milligan (2003); the Oxford World's Classics edition with the same title, edited by Grevel Lindop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and *On Murder*, edited by Robert Morrison for Oxford World's Classics (2006).

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Thomas De Quincey belonged to a cultural milieu in which words were sophisticated playthings. He wrote for a rapidly expanding market in literary magazines, that appealed to classically educated readers in gentlemen's clubs, and was so prolific that he admitted in later life that he would be at a loss if anyone approached him about a collection of his own works. There might be no end to the search. Proliferation also operates at the level of the sentence: De Quincey is a virtuoso of the subordinate clause, and the parenthetical tangent, but such games of technical bravado with syntax hold little charm for a contemporary general audience. His prose is riddled with mannerisms that belong to the shared humour of a cultural milieu now remote from us. Effects of horror, suspense, and hilarity may have a more enduring currency, but only if they are extracted from the discursive density in which they are embedded. Inevitably, this work of extraction is to an extent an exercise in sacrilege, though what is lost makes way for other forms of expression.

The question of how the figure of Thomas De Quincey should be portrayed on stage was prominent for us at the outset, and related to it was one of our first determinations: we did not want his words spoken live by a physically present performer. Tess's performance was about the rendition of presence and persona, not about the realisation of a person. The body was a medium through which visions, atmospheres, and sensory experiences could be registered and made immediate for an audience.

From our readings, De Quincey's prose came across to us as multivoiced, and we were interested in the persona shifts through which he achieves dramatic changes of register. Yet to multiply the voices, then set them free in space as disembodied elements, was also to lose the anchor of a continuous narrative guide. A convention in the use of sound in both theatre and cinema is the primacy of the text and therefore the voice that delivers it, so the voice usually occupies the sonic foreground, relieving the audience of the burden of selective perception, which may involve split-second choices as to where attention should be focused in the interests of comprehension. But new media enables new approaches to the orchestration of sound and sense, and the challenge with this work was to find an effective balance between random and designed sequences in the soundtrack. This meant taking a holistic approach to the creation of narrative through image, movement, spatial relationships, and non-verbal as well as verbal sound components.

During the two years we worked on the De Quincey project, we had the opportunity to work in buildings that added significant dimensions to the drama. Our first residency, in 2007, was at Rushcutters Bay's Drill Hall, a two-story timber building originally constructed at Fort Macquarie in 1890, and transported to Rushcutters Bay in 1900.[3] The main hall has been adapted into an eighteen-by-ten-metre dance

3 This residency was made possible through the support The Performance Space, Sydney, and the

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studio where the full-length regency-style windows throw changing paths of daylight across the glossy black floor. During the daytime, people coming towards the building from outside sometimes looked as if they were about to pass directly into it, like phantoms. By deflecting the light with mirrors, we could create the illusion of a doorway in the centre of the darkened space, and produce diminished reflections of a figure entering in slow motion. Such effects chimed with key elements in De Quincey's narratives: a stalker to whom all built structures are permeable; delusions of scale and perspective; the romance of changing light.

We discovered that at twilight, intense shafts of sunlight would appear at odd angles, and human shadows were magnified to giant proportions against the back wall. Circular grills at either end the gabled roof glowed gold, like moons. A work-in-progress showing, for performance industry and community and entitled *The Faculty of Dreaming*, was presented at dusk at the Drill Hall so as to take advantage of these natural lighting effects. Having discovered some aesthetic parameters for a theatrical rendition of Thomas De Quincey's imaginings, we devised sequences of voiced text that could be projected through the space, like the light, from unexpected directions and suggestive of shifting scales. We wanted to create vocal lines that would feature as expressive contours of sound, and sound effects that would come across as unexpected statements. Sounds such as breathing, blowing, rubbing, striking, falling, stepping, or knocking would be introduced not in composed sequences, but rather as brief or isolated gestures, demanding interpretation in the same way as a cryptic line of speech.

Through the developmental residency at the Drill, we began to create a sensory environment in which inside and outside, virtual and actual, material and phantasmal, might phase into each other but could also be rendered as sharply distinct. One of the keys to the dramatic tension De Quincey builds in his narratives is precisely the capacity to distinguish between these polarities, so that the loss of perceptual orientation is a disturbing, sometimes urgently alarming, experience. The sense of hearing, perhaps more than the sense of sight, accentuates the progressive stages of this experience. As Frances Dyson (2009) puts it in a recent study of sound in new media, "sound surrounds":

> Its phenomenal characteristics—the fact that it is invisible, intangible, ephemeral, and vibrational—coordinate with the physiology of the ears, to create a perceptual experience profoundly different from the dominant sense of sight. (4)

Sound surrounds, but it is also directional, and the spatial identification of its source can be a matter of acute concern, especially where it is associated with danger or

research hub for dance in NSW, Critical Path. Funding for the performance session at Carriageworks came from Arts New South Wales.

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threat, so that it teases us into a state of hyper-alertness. In the theatre, sound can be given an almost tangible presence through control over its spatial and temporal placement, and the management of volume.

Murder Stories

We were concerned to find ways of realising the shifting personae De Quincey adopts in his writings. In a series of narratives we termed "the murder texts" (often regarded as one of the founding influences on the generic crime thriller) he creates a flamboyant alter-ego: a gentlemen's club lecturer, who seems like an incarnation of language itself, in all its most baroque formations. This figure is performative and favours direct address.

> Sir,
>
> We have all heard of a Society for the Promotion of Vice, of the Hell-Fire Club, &c. I think it was that a Society was formed for the Suppression of Virtue. That Society was itself suppressed—but I am sorry to say that another exists in London, of a character still more atrocious. In tendency, it may be denominated a Society for the Encouragement of Murder. (De Quincey 2006, 8)

There is a tone of voice here, and the requirement for a particular edge in delivery, but what is most entertaining, from a performance point of view, is how the speaker starts to lead himself astray. As he warms to his subject, he continually seeks to draw a moral boundary around his position, and is repeatedly distracted into parentheses and qualifications. "I do affirm, and always shall, (let what will come of it) that murder is an improper line of conduct" (10). "[L]et me again solemnly disclaim all pretensions on my own part to the character of a professional man. I never attempted any murder in my life, except in the year 1801, upon the body of a tom-cat" (33).

But the boundary keeps slipping and blurring, even as he tries to reinforce it. "For if once a man indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to think little of robbing; and from robbing he comes next to drinking and Sabbath-breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination" (De Quincey 2006, 84). With this, some kind of behavioural slippage is also occurring in the lecturer. He is losing his supercilious detachment, and becomes subject to a form of hysterical hiccup. "Excuse my laughing, gentlemen, but the fact is, I always do laugh when I think of this case" (17). As an audience, the more you become immersed in the frothy wash of talk, the more you realise that there is something very wrong about it; distinctly sinister orientations develop.

To put this talk into the mouth of an individual on stage would be to anchor it in a level of physical reality that does not belong to it, because it is not speech

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exactly, but rather talk in the head. Instead, it is set free in the surrounding space of non-verbal performance. Tess de Quincey, as a Body Weather performer, is able to embody other kinds of reality, serving as a medium through which personalities and attitudes may pass according to the larger narrative shapes unfolding.

The process of creating a sound track for the voice of the lecturer began with some creative editing, for which we adopted three strategies. The first of these was to identify phrases or statements that worked in isolation, as aphorisms, exclamations, or poetic phrases. Examples from the murder texts include:

> But you shall hear. (De Quincey 2006, 71)
>
> People will not submit to have their throats cut quietly! (26)
>
> Some dogs, Sir, have an idea of murder. (85)
>
> [...] correspondence going on between darkness and darkness. (36-37)
>
> Another world has stepped in. (6)
>
> When the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away. (6)
>
> I know who it was. (25)

With disembodied voicing, such isolated expressions worked as leitmotifs, recurring intermittently through the soundtrack. They could be spoken to very different effect by different voices. "I know who it was" has an obvious resonance as a pronouncement from the know-all lecturer, but this can be starkly counterpointed if it is also delivered as the whisper of a child. The whisper can itself be accentuated through reverberation and multiple tracking, dropping to a semi-audible *continuo* under subsequent dialogue, to uncanny effect.

In the work of sound composition, the voice of the lecturer needed careful control. His wordy self-consciousness could come across as merely irritating to a present-day audience, but we found when we heard the soundtrack in the Carriageworks studio, an industrial space with an eight-meter ceiling height and bare walls, that the randomised echoes and repetitions of the mannered prose worked to accentuate the sense that this is a voice that is always hearing itself back, replaying its own witticisms and *bon mots*, now in coherent sequence, now in a scrambled pastiche.

Our sound recording script for this sequence was scored for a child's voice (Voice 1), the voice of the lecturer as Thomas De Quincey might have envisaged it (Voice 2), and an expressionist personal demon (Voice 3):

> Voice 1: In order that a new world may step in, this world must for a time disappear.

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Laughter. Short laughs. Scattered and various.

Voice 3: Excuse my laughing, gentlemen. But the fact is I always do laugh when I think of this case.

Voice 2: For, gentlemen, it is a fact. That every philosopher of eminence for the last two centuries has been murdered. Or at least, been very near it. With some exceptions.

Voice 1: I know who it was.

Voice 3: There is giggling, under. The fact is. Gentlemen excuse the fact. The fact is I always do laugh.

Voice 2: Exceptions. Hobbes. In every light a fine subject for murder.

Voice 3: Lean and skinny.

Voice 2: He had money. And (what is very funny) he had no right to make the least resistance.

Voice 3: For it is rebellion of the blackest die to refuse to be murdered when a competent force appears to murder you.

Silence. Sudden, isolated explosion of laughter. Then orchestrated laughter, giggling of various kinds, takes over.

During this sequence, the keynote for the live performer is the first statement, made by the child. Tess de Quincey moves through a space in which light projections create massive expressionist abstracts on floating screens of gauze. Her facial expression flickers between the open blankness of an unformed intelligence, and the grimace of an incubus as it tunes into the exchanges of statement in the air around.

Approaching Thomas De Quincey's writings in this way allows their sensory dimensions to come to the fore, and as we explored them, we became aware of how some of the narratives are shaped through a heightened awareness of sound. In the murder texts, there are subtle modal shifts between the quasi-monologue of the gentleman lecturer and a form of storytelling that belongs to witnesses, whose involved recital of unfolding events arises from entirely other registers of consciousness. De Quincey is evidently curious about how such apparently conflicting registers can phase into each other, and this occurs especially in the first and last texts of the *On Murder* collection: "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*" and "Postscript." Both of these can be read as virtual sound compositions.

"On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*" begins in the tone we came to associate with the later figure of the "Fine Art" lecturer.

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> The mere understanding, however useful and indispensable, is the meanest faculty in the human mind and the most to be distrusted. (De Quincey 2006, 3)

De Quincey's point is that the senses and the understanding do not work in concert, and although he begins with examples of the capricious relationship between the eye and the brain, it is in relation to sonic experience that his meditation really cuts to the chase.

In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the crisis of Duncan's murder is subordinated to that of its aftermath, which turns between the polarities of tumult and silence. Thomas De Quincey wrote:

> [T]he world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested—laid asleep—tranced—racked into a dread armistice: time must be annihilated; relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is that when the deed is done—when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard. (2006, 6-7)

In vocal delivery, we wanted to accentuate the way De Quincey's writing pulls the frame of thought outwards, opening it to metaphysical dimensions; it is sonic awareness that makes the outward stretch.

The soundtrack in *Ghost Quarters* was composed so that the audience's attention would fluctuate between the modes of listening, hearing, perceiving, and comprehending. A normal listener is capable of focusing on one source within a complex sound-field (this is known as the cocktail-party effect), and we have the capacity to follow perhaps three foreground elements at once. The difference between foreground and background is determined to a large extent by the attention paid to the various sound elements by the listener. Once some threshold number of streams of information is exceeded, the sound elements appear to collapse into undifferentiated noise. Our ability to follow more than one stream is enhanced by spatial separation of the sources. This tension between being able to follow several lines of vocal material, enhanced by the use of multichannel sound playback, and having one's cognitive capacity overwhelmed by the number of simultaneous lines of text was intended to enhance the sense of immersion in scenes where the narrative line concerned threshold experiences of terror and disorientation.

Murder is a topic Thomas De Quincey returned to persistently, across several decades, as if he himself still had something to discover from it. The "Postscript" to the two lectures on murder, first published in 1854, turned into a substantial essay in its own right, extending to nearly 20,000 words. In it, he puts the mannered persona of the lecturer aside and embarks on a series of semi-documentary accounts of murders from recent London history, moving the point of view closer and closer

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towards that of first-hand witnesses who escaped to tell the tale and, at certain moments, to that of the victims who did not. There is a conscious theatricality about the presentation. “Consider it a stage spectacle,” the reader is instructed, with “dramatic features of thrilling interest” (De Quincey, 2006, 96 and 118).

Silence and sound become the crucial stratagems in the endgame between murderer and victim. Life is at stake with every breath, whisper, creaking floorboard, and creeping step. The clock strikes the retiring hour. Wind whistles between the houses, shutters close, and the watchman’s retreating steps are heard. At that point, the murderer slips into the house, taking a split second of opportunity before the door is bolted. This fatal entry forms the first part of “the silent hieroglyphics of the case”(106-107). Any outcry before the blow is struck will ruin the enterprise, so the murderer must stalk his victim without making any sound. All the better if the victim is busy with some noisy activity, like the housemaid who, with her head in the grate, is scraping away at the ashes. A blow is struck with a heavy mallet. A skull cracks. A body falls. Now the murderer must act fast. Others hear these events and rush to the scene, so he must be ready for them, to lay them senseless before they can utter a cry. For a period of time, silence reigns, as the sign of his triumph—until a servant returns from a late errand and is disturbed at the prolonged silence in response to the knock on the door.

Inside the murder house, those who fail to hear noise listen urgently to silence, and audibility reaches its most attenuated degrees on the human breath. In this heightened state of attention, every second counts, and is counted.

> Voice 1 (child): Next was heard most distinctly a footfall. One, two, three, four, five stairs were slowly and distinctly descended. Then the footsteps were heard advancing along the little narrow passage to the door. Paused at the door.
>
> Voice 3 (demon): The very breathing can be heard of that being.
>
> Voice 1: Who has silenced all breathing except his own in the house. What is he doing on the other side of the door?

At this point, nothing but stillness is required of the performer on stage. In the real-time environment of theatre, a heightened sense of the passing of time can be cultivated. Body Weather, derived from Butoh, is a discipline in which performers are trained to extend the unfolding of an arc of movement, or a facial expression, so that it can be watched as a second-by-second process of development, in which every nuance becomes visible. Tess de Quincey works to control the audience experience of time throughout the presentation, creating moments when time seems to stop. The slippery relationship between time and consciousness is one of the mysteries of the murder scene in Thomas De Quincey’s writing, and the most arresting image in the postscript is that of a victim who manages to struggle to her feet

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before succumbing to terrible injuries. With the effect of rewinding the temporal sequence, the line reads: "[s]olemnly and in ghostly silence uprose in her dying delirium the murdered girl" (2006, 139). Its wording is grammatically reversed, to echo the uncanny reversal by which the stricken girl is seen rising up instead of falling down. Murder twists the laws of the physical and psychical worlds, putting the senses of sight and hearing into estranged relationship with the environment, so that "the mere understanding," singled out for contempt at the beginning of De Quincey's first murder text, is confounded (3).

Sighs From the Deep

Voices in the head behave differently from voices in the exterior world. They do not finish their sentences. They repeat themselves in varying combinations, with different degrees of emphasis, depending on the levels of stress to which the mind is subject. They always already know what they are going to say, so, hearing themselves back, they anticipate their own cadences, sometimes fast-forwarding to some point of unresolved contention, halted only by the surprise new entry of a phrase from elsewhere. Although De Quincey never fails to finish a sentence (and his grammatical contortions are always under sophisticated control), his prose belongs ultimately to the voices in the head, and our rendition of it through multiple speakers distributed around a space of exaggerated height, the performance venue of Carriageworks, serves to accentuate the impression of an interior monologue that keeps going off the rails.

As solo performer, Tess de Quincey was, as previously mentioned, in a non-speaking role. But, as dramaturg (jointly with Jane Goodall), Tess was strongly committed to realising the psychological depth-charge that came through the language. A good half-century in advance of Freud, the writings of Thomas De Quincey were already exploring consciousness as an architecture, constructed on a surface through which shafts are sunk to deeper levels, and supervised by some overarching intelligence that exercises arbitrary rights of fiat and veto. Opium has the effect of disturbing the layers on this vertical axis so that they phase into each other. Spatial imagery is prominent throughout the *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, and the work turns on a vertical plane, drawing in several thematic archetypes.

The ocean is an obvious metaphor for the deeps, and the way things may rise from them to become visible and float on the surface. *Suspiria de Profundis* signals in its title an image of breath drawn from far down in the lungs, and released audibly as an ascending stream of air. Death and dying are portrayed in both texts as movements of ascent and descent: a dying body is buried under the earth, while the spirit soars. These metaphoric associations converge in key passages of the text.

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In a further prefiguration of Freud, one of these metaphors is the oceanic mind, which for Thomas De Quincey equates both with states of turmoil, and of serenity. When the waters are agitated, memories and associations are stirred from the deeps, like the faces of the dead.

> Now the tyranny of the human face began to unfold itself. Now it was that upon the rocking waters of the ocean faces began to appear, turned upwards to the heavens. A multitude of expressions—imploring, wrathful, despairing—surged upwards by thousands, by myriads, by generations, by centuries. (De Quincey 2003, 80)

The causes of horror "lie deep" and the torments stirred from the greatest depths are those "of passing out from one existence into another" (88). Such intensities of affect are for the performer to realise, through the controlled release of motion in the expressive body, and a rhythmic flow that echoes the lyrical/elegiac tone of the lines. It was Tess's job to literally bring the imagery into the body, and channel it expressively. The performance was concerned with the communication of raw sensory experience. Images and sounds, but sounds especially, seemed to move through the physical presence of the performer as if unfiltered by the interpreting consciousness.

Both Thomas and Tess De Quincey are interested in the human being as a receptor, and the dramaturgical process in *Ghost Quarters* was energised by Tess's delight at Thomas's genius for realising in words what she had been working with in Body Weather training and practice. Thomas De Quincey was drawn to the image of the Aeolian harp, as an instrument sounded by passing airs and winds, without the intervention of deliberate playing. To think of oneself as an Aeolian harp is to assume a condition of mental purity impossible to human beings. Thoughts are not played across the mind like notes sounded by some divinely originating motion. Yet might this not be the case with a child, who can fall into a state of profound reverie?

In *Suspiria*, the epicenter of Thomas De Quincey's narrative is an early childhood incident that "drove a shaft for me into the worlds of death and darkness which never again closed, and through which it might be said that I ascended and descended at will, according to the temper of my spirits" (2003, 95). Entering the room where his sister has recently died, he expects to see the corpse, but the bed has been moved.

> Nothing met my eyes but one large window wide open, through which the sun of midsummer at noonday was showering down torrents of splendour. The weather was dry, the sky was cloudless, the blue depths seemed the express types of infinity. (106)

De Quincey is focusing on sensory experience rather than thought processes; and the strings that are sounded—metaphorically, the resonant interceptors of the energy stream—are the material factors in the environment from which impressions

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are received by the senses. In this case, the significant interceptor is a shaft of summer sun.

After it, though, comes a second intervention. The child turns to where the bed has been moved, and sees the corpse:

> and, whilst I stood, a solemn wind began to blow—the most mournful that ear ever heard[...]. It was a wind that had swept the fields of mortality for a hundred centuries. (109)

The wind is referred to as both Aeolian and "Memnonian" (alluding to the Greek statue of Memnon, supposed in the myth to have held a lute that responded to rising winds at dawn and dusk). So the child, with the wind in his ears and the light in his eyes, experiences a further vision, in a full trance state during which he rises on the shaft of light, as if into infinity. But later, when the figure Thomas De Quincey names the "Dark Interpreter" takes over as the narrative guide, it is clear that this is a scene in which he has gained entry.

> This Dark Interpreter, whom you will learn to know as an intruder into your dreams, who moves in volleying darkness, who recalls to you your own lurking thoughts, rises up with the movement of the night**.** This dark being you will see again. And I warn you that it will not always be found sitting inside your dreams, but at times outside, and in open daylight. (2003, 163-164)

Through the mediations of this guide, the vertical scenography of *Confessions* and "Suspiria" acquires Dante-esque proportions. Opium reveals the Purgatorio, then the Inferno. The worlds of life and after-life churn, making a vast industrial cacophony in place of the music of the spheres, and the way to the Paradiso is not to be found without a bone-shaking tour through the regions below. From an audience point of view, it is a matter of tuning in and staying the course. A theatrical rendition makes this a collective experience, one that unashamedly veers into melodrama, but does so with a sustained commitment to immediate sensory response.

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