

Touch: Transmission, Contact, Connection

In April 1917, while serving as an ambulance driver for the International Red Cross, E. M. Forster organized an ad hoc concert for military patients at a convalescent hospital in the Egyptian town of Montazah. Towards the end of the programme, Forster himself took to the stage and played on the piano an arrangement of music from Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, the 'Pathétique'. He later wrote to Edward Carpenter of his delight in the performance: 'I was able to talk sense and quiet [the soldiers] because I loved them [...] I felt that I had been burrowing under rubbish and touched something that was alive and had been trying to touch me.'¹ Forster's hands at the piano are figured as engaging in a process of queer tactile exploration. They 'burrow' blindly, feeling their way through the abject 'rubbish' of shame and loneliness to discover the warm, receptive touch of a hand that has, in turn, been awaiting theirs. As Forster's fingers play over the keys on the piano before him, his touch is broadcast to the receptive bodies of the soldiers as they listen. Invested with the warmth of this desiring touch, Tchaikovsky's music – a familiar symbol for the joy and pathos of homosexual desire in Forster's *Maurice* – reaches through space to bring queer bodies into closer contact.²

Building on the emphasis in previous chapters on the refusal of embodied aspects of sexuality and musical experience, the present chapter explores relations between music and touch, charting the sensory intensities and eroticism inherent in *fin-de-siècle* literary depictions of physical contact with musical instruments and scores and in feeling the material touch of music in performance. To think carefully about the tactile experience of queer marginalized subjects is to consider how subjectivities are formed through the refusal of intimate contact between bodies. If the perception of music is considered in tactile terms, it becomes possible to articulate the significance of musical experiences that serve to collapse the spatial distances that separate queer bodies. In texts that figure music in terms of transmission and displacement, rigid boundaries between self and

other, subject and object, are dissolved. The orientations that separate queer bodies in space and time are reconfigured in texts that foreground music's power to broadcast tactile intimacy from body to body across concert halls and drawing rooms, or across the expanses of music history. In such texts, musical instruments and musical scores become invested, through sustained tactile contact, with a resonance that transforms them into conduits for the often unspoken transmission of desire between displaced bodies. Fingers play on the polished ivory of a keyboard, or press on the taut strings of a violin, or write out a score on creamy parchment. Such bodily interactions invest music's material objects with affective significance, transforming them into resonant archives of the queer touch.

In its preoccupation with the queerness of such experiences, my discussion draws upon recent studies such as William Cohen's *Embodied* (2009) in foregrounding the phenomenological significance of touch and affect in the interface between self and world in Victorian literature. Charting the entanglement of bodies, musical instruments and music makes it possible to delineate the emergence of a late Victorian queer erotic sensorium linked to the tactile experience of music. While accounts of the representation of the sensory experience of music in *fin-de-siècle* literary texts have perhaps unsurprisingly privileged the aural and (less frequently) the visual, the discussion that follows addresses a wider range of sensory responses, suggesting that a sustained focus on tactile experience might provide a richer account of the embodied nature of engagement with music as both a listener and a performer.³

This chapter examines encounters between bodies and musical instruments in Richard Marsh's 'The Violin' (1891), Forster's 'Dr Woolcott' (1926) and the anonymous pornographic novel *Teleny* (1893).⁴ In doing so, it traces how tactile intimacy between musician and instrument sees the musical instrument transformed into a technology for the transmission of touch, acting to close the physical distance between those queer bodies that might otherwise remain untouchable. It proceeds to compare the experience of piano playing in Forster's *A Room with a View* (1908) with Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915) to suggest that tactile interaction between the body and the musical instrument allows for marginalized subjects to more fully inhabit a sense of their desiring bodies.⁵ Finally, the chapter examines tactile encounters with the musical score, focussing in particular on Vernon Lee's experiences with the archival remains of eighteenth-century music in *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880).⁶ It explores Lee's sensuous archival engagement and draws attention to how her affective engagement with the historical past is articulated through a

wish for restored tactile contact. The queerness of Lee's writing inheres in the pervasive mood of loss that underpins its desire for a mode of tactile engagement that might allow for the recovery of a sense of transhistorical community.

The work of theorists such as Constance Classen has prompted a renewed interest in the manner in which touch animates our experience of the social world.⁷ Critical engagement with the nature of embodied experience has sought to analyse the manner in which social ideologies are conveyed and sustained through sensory values and practices. As noted in Chapter 2, much critical attention has been afforded in recent years to the body's margins: theorists such as Didier Anzieu, Michel Serres and Steven Connor have posited the skin – and its associated sensory intensities of touch – as a key site for exploring ideas of selfhood and the interface between the embodied self and the world.⁸ The experience of touch has also become central to the work of theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Sara Ahmed, who aim to account for the importance of affective experience in the formation of queer subjectivities.⁹

In talking here of the *queerness* of the musical touch, I seek to acknowledge the particularity of the experience of 'untouchability' of queer subjects at the *fin de siècle*, while also pursuing a reading strategy responsive to recent phenomenologically inflected work in queer theory. Such work has done much to explore ways in which sensory experience might complicate or challenge foundational accounts of the coherence of identity. The work of phenomenological theorists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty ascribes to touch a central place in discussions of human embodied experience. Merleau-Ponty suggests that human subjectivity emerges through the experience of the body's proximate encounters with sensory surfaces. The distinction between the subject and the external world of objects is formed and demarcated by the tactile interactions of the body in the world.¹⁰ In similar terms, Bataille and Deleuze and Guattari posit the body as a sensory interface between the interior and the world, engaged in a continual process of flux and becoming, where the sensory experience of the body becomes a source for the making and unmaking of subjectivity.¹¹ As Cohen has convincingly argued, such sensory experience might be understood as queer in its representation of 'an openness of the body to the world by the senses as a type of permeability, or penetrability, that is not reducible to heterosexuality – nor is it ever limited to the realm of the sexual'.¹² Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* has drawn attention to those 'queer orientations' that allow bodies that have traditionally been placed spatially 'out of reach' to come into closer contact with each other. As

Ahmed notes, touch involves an economy that insists upon ‘a differentiation between those who can and cannot be reached’: it ‘opens bodies to some bodies and not others’.¹³ An attention to ‘queer orientations’, then, encourages the exploration of those phenomenological experiences that bring marginalized subjects to feel the touch of other bodies. The musical touch at the *fin de siècle* ‘orients’ queer bodies to allow them to find new forms of contact, whether with other queer bodies or by affording a more secure sense of embodied subjectivity or a more affectively intense relationship with the musical past.

The sensory experience of touch informs a variety of aspects of musical experience explored in *fin-de-siècle* literature: the experience of the hands as they engage with an instrument to create music, the experience of touching the score or of merely holding an instrument in one’s hands. The literary texts I discuss also capture something of the experience of listening to music as a *tactile* experience – that is, music is experienced not just as *heard* through the ear, but also as *felt* on the surface of the body. Indeed, in Victorian materialist accounts of the psychology of music, hearing is often figured as taking place at the visceral level of the nerves, or on the surface of the skin, rather than solely through the ear. The affective intensity of listening to Richard Wagner’s *Lohengrin* leads Edmund Gurney, for example, to speculate as to ‘whether music should be called a spinal or a cutaneous affection’.¹⁴ In John Henry Newman’s *The Dream of Gerontius* (1865) – now most familiar from Edward Elgar’s oratorio setting of 1900 – the soul of the eponymous everyman enters purgatory to the sound of music:

And hark! I hear a singing; yet in sooth
I cannot of that music rightly say
Whether I hear or touch or taste the tones.¹⁵

The experience of this ethereal music here enfolds the senses into one another: the aural, tactile and gustatory become indistinguishable. While Newman’s text is more concerned with the spiritual experience of salvation than with the phenomenology of sensory perception, it anticipates late nineteenth-century culture’s emerging interest in the multidirectional interaction of the senses. Charles Baudelaire’s poem ‘Correspondances’ evokes the ‘shadowy, profound’ integration of the senses, while Arthur Rimbaud praises the ideal seer-poet as one who embarks upon ‘a long, vast, reasoned, derangement of all the sensations’.¹⁶ In Joris-Karl Huysmans’s *À rebours* (*Against Nature*), des Esseintes enacts just such a ‘derangement’ of the olfactory, gustatory and auditory by selecting odours to form ‘perfume

concerts' and building a 'mouth organ' that dispenses liquors to play 'silent melodies on the tongue'.¹⁷

As Ryan Bishop has suggested in his discussion of 'musical haptics', acknowledging the tactile experience of sound allows for a better understanding of the manner in which hearing may similarly be experienced as a sense of proximate contact. 'Sound', Bishop notes, 'is also already touch': it is 'composed of waves that physically and invisibly touch our ears and bodies', and thus 'to touch a tympanum, to caress the cochlea, one needs the invisible touch of sound waves'.¹⁸ That sound is both produced by touch (the finger on the keyboard) and perceived through touch (the soundwave as it touches the skin) means that rather than being a *distant* sense, it may alternatively be experienced as a proximate one, bringing the bodies of those subjects placed at a distance into closer contact. In recent years, considerable work on tactile theories of visual art has charted the reorientation of the senses in the late nineteenth century, from the dominant mode of visual perception to a tactile mode of engagement that presents more intimate, affective relations between subjects and objects.¹⁹

'Beyond the Reach of These Hands': Untouchable Bodies at the *Fin de Siècle*

Before proceeding to trace the contours of these musico-tactile orientations in literary texts, we might usefully turn to consider in more detail the manner in which the lives of queer subjects in this period are shaped around those tropes of 'untouchability' which, as Heather Love has noted, 'run deep in queer experience'.²⁰ The body of the queer subject is very often isolated from the tender physical caress of the lover's touch, their desire for contact with the warm skin of another frustrated by fear or shame. For Carolyn Dinshaw, '*Noli me tangere*' – do not touch me – serves as a motto for the refusal of touch that complicates any attempt to establish a queer historical genealogy.²¹ For queer subjects, so often starved of sensual physical contact, the fantasy of being touched is a particularly powerful one. The physical touch becomes burdened with intense meaning. If, as Emmanuel Levinas has argued, subjects are implicated in the world through their experience of tactile proximity and intimacy, the depleted experience of the *feel* of other bodies acts, for the queer subject, to form their subjectivity around a sense of their untouchability.²²

One way to situate this 'untouchability', at least from the perspective of queer men in the period, is to place it in the wider context of expectations relating to Victorian masculinity. While Constance Classen is correct in

her assertion that ‘the stiff untouchability of the Englishman [...] is legendary’, she nevertheless acknowledges the historical contingency of such cultural prohibitions on tactile contact between men.²³ As Alan Bray and Michel Rey have shown, for example, men in early modern England frequently embraced, kissed and shared beds.²⁴ While tactile interactions between men in England at the *fin de siècle* were, in general, more ‘hands-off’ than in earlier periods, to imply too monolithic a prohibition on such physical contact would be to overlook the varieties of codes of touching that subsisted across different homosocial communities. Holly Furneaux’s work on Dickens, for example, has drawn attention to a tradition of ‘reparative touch’ between men in Victorian culture, a form of physical interaction that eschewed pervasive cultural expectations of masculine aggressiveness to embrace instead the gentle tenderness of nursing.²⁵ In similar terms, Santanu Das has explored the tactile intimacies that emerged in the context of the First World War, where the male touch primarily served not to express homoerotic desire, but rather to respond to the pain of the soldier’s wounded or emaciated body.²⁶

Nevertheless, as Victoria Mills has noted, following Wilde’s 1895 trial and conviction for ‘gross indecency’, affectionate tactile contact between men was increasingly associated with perversion and degenerative behaviour.²⁷ Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds’s *Sexual Inversion* reflected wider cultural assumptions in explicitly linking the language of the caress to male same-sex desire.²⁸ Some institutions seemingly allowed, or at least passively tolerated, public tactile expressions of close intimacy between men of a sort that would not have been possible elsewhere. When Arthur Benson attended a dinner at King’s College, Cambridge, in 1909, for example, he observed among the (all-male) students ‘the public *fondling* and *caressing* of each other, friends and lovers sitting with *arms enlaced*, cheeks even *touching*’ (italics added). Such an open display of homoerotic intimacy struck Benson as ‘curious’ and ‘rather dangerous’.²⁹ Benson’s anecdote provides a useful riposte to accounts that emphasize too insistently the ‘untouchable’ nature of the male body at the *fin de siècle*. Even if such behaviour is evidence only of an intensely relaxed homosociality among Cambridge undergraduates, Benson’s response serves as a reminder of the pervasive cultural paranoia that attached to expressions of male tactile intimacy in England at this time.

Given the peculiar importance of touch – its absence, its withdrawal, its intense communicative potential – to queer life experience, it is perhaps unsurprising that the writers upon which this study focusses dwell in significant ways on the tactile experience of desire. The writings of John

Addington Symonds, for example, repeatedly evoke the isolation and loneliness of queer experience in descriptions of failed or frustrated touch. In a poignant letter to a friend, he laments that Norman Moor, one of the adolescent school pupils with whom he is besotted, is 'beyond the reach of these hands even to touch him'.³⁰ For Symonds, the inability to 'touch or get close to' the 'magnificent young people' he sees around him makes him feel like 'a statue walking among men', his sensitive, living flesh transformed into cold, hard, impervious marble.³¹ The sustained withdrawal of human physical contact risks, he suggests, deadening the body's ability to experience the sensuous plenitude of tactile intimacy. As a 'walking' 'statue', Symonds's body retains the inner musculature that sustains dynamic physical movement, but its surface – its skin – has become senseless to the touch. Elsewhere, Symonds expresses a desire to utilize tactile intimacy in the service of queer community formation, while simultaneously being cowed by fears of self-exposure and humiliation. Particularly striking is Symonds's encounter with what he describes as a 'man-woman, so strong & sweet & magnetic' on a train in northern Italy: 'How strange [...] to feel the palpitation of a being like oneself so near one's own & not to be able to touch! Perhaps it is better not to touch & try & find no fusion.'³² Symonds's anecdote movingly foregrounds the feelings of deep isolation felt by many queer subjects in the late nineteenth century, and how precarious the task of building a sense of queer community might be. Symonds is drawn almost compulsively to reach out towards a person whom he recognizes as a member of a fellow sexual minority, but is held back by the fear of finding 'no fusion', of his touch remaining unwanted or its intent being misinterpreted. It is perhaps no coincidence that Symonds was haunted as a child by nightmares in which a 'finger, disconnected from any hand, crept slowly into [his] room [...] crooking its joints and beckoning'. Terrified of what would happen if this ghastly disembodied finger touched him, the young Symonds always awoke before the 'catastrophe' of tactile contact occurred.³³ As such examples suggest, the physical touch becomes invested for Symonds with a dissoluble combination of desire, disgust, fear and fantasy.

Walter Pater's writings similarly express both a desire for tactile intimacy and the pathos of the impossibility of such a connection. Pater places the experience of the tactile at the centre of his sensuous model of aesthetics, calling for an appreciation of art 'not through the understanding, but by instinct or touch'.³⁴ This aesthetic mode of life is invested with an urgency that implores each individual to '[gather] all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch'.³⁵ Yet, as Kate Hext has observed, the sculpted

marble bodies that populate Pater's works are always in some way 'out of touch': 'the idealized male body tantalizes the imagination with the possibility of touch [. . .] only to deny the reality of warm responsive flesh and reciprocal desire'.³⁶ Pater praises the 'unembarrassed' Winckelmann as one who 'finger[ed] with unsinged hands', 'with no sense of shame or loss', the 'pagan marbles' he saw about him, while in his own life remaining distant and aloof from the unadulterated sensuality implied by this mode of aesthetic encounter.³⁷

In the works of E. M. Forster, the significance of the queer touch is evidenced most strikingly in the 'Terminal Note' to *Maurice*. Here, Forster presents the origins of his most overtly homosexual novel as lying in a quasi-mystical tactile encounter with George Merrill, the partner of Edward Carpenter.³⁸ The men's influence acted, Forster recalled, to 'touch a creative spring', to 'kindle' the 'spark' of inspiration. Merrill, he reports, 'touched my backside – gently and just above the buttocks': 'The sensation was unusual and I still remember it [. . .] It was as much psychological as physical. It seemed to go straight through the small of my back into my ideas, without involving my thoughts.'³⁹ This touch has, for Forster, an affective intensity that allows it to overcome the restraint of the conscious mind, achieving expression directly through the body. It also represents a moment of queer insemination: in accordance with Carpenter's 'yogified mysticism', Forster notes, its effect 'would prove that at that precise moment I had conceived'. *Maurice* stands as the queer offspring of touch's generative potential. More generally, the centrality of tactile experience in these accounts of queer life experience invite renewed attention to the significance of touch in *fin-de-siècle* literary texts and, in particular, those dealing with music.

'I Know His Touch': Musical Instruments and the Transmission of Touch

In *fin-de-siècle* literary texts, tactile interactions with musical instruments enact those 'queer orientations' identified by Ahmed in which the sense of spatial distance between marginalized subjects is collapsed. In Richard Marsh's short story 'The Violin', sustained tactile intimacy invests the titular instrument with erotic desire, so that to hold it in one's hands becomes a way of sensing the touch of a lost lover. In the pornographic novel *Teleny*, the piano acts to facilitate the transmission of touch between bodies, broadcasting the hands of the pianist onto the body of the listener. In E. M. Forster's 'Dr Woolacott', the queer touch between bodies is

conflated with the act of playing the violin, so that the violin's music serves as an aural externalization of the desiring queer touch.

In Marsh's story 'The Violin' the titular instrument becomes a conduit for the transmission of the intimate touch between men.⁴⁰ Marsh's text begins with the narrator buying a violin, at a suspiciously low price, from a rag-and-bone shop as a gift for his nephew, Ernest. After examining the violin closely and playing on it a snatch of melody, Ernest begins to suspect that the instrument is one that belonged to his musician friend Philip Coursault, 'a strange and wild young man' (95), who has recently gone missing. While the narrator and his nephew discuss Philip's bohemian life as a musician over dinner, they hear the sound of the violin being played in the drawing room above their heads – 'quaint and sweet and mournful, like the refrain of an old-world song' (100). Yet when they head upstairs to investigate the identity of the mysterious musician, the sound fades as they approach and they discover the violin still enclosed within its unopened case on a table. As the violin repeats its ghostly melody throughout the evening, Ernest begins to recognize it as one composed by Philip in 'commemoration of certain pleasant days' (104) which the two young men spent together. Convinced that this ghostly music suggests that something has happened to Philip, Ernest determines to confront the proprietor of the rag-and-bone shop, who soon admits that she had purchased the violin from Philip. She too has been tormented by the violin's obsessive nocturnal repetitions of this melody.

The following day, the narrator acts as chaperone for Ernest and a young girl, Minnie, on a gentle rowing trip on the Thames. Ernest persistently dwells on the topic of his lost friend, Philip, and his ghostly violin. He soon admits that the direction of his rowing is motivated by a desire not simply to discover a pleasant picnic spot, but rather to return the point on the riverbank where he and Philip enjoyed the 'pleasantest of all [their] pleasant days' (113). As they talk about Philip's love for the willow trees that overhang the riverbank, Minnie absent-mindedly reaches her hand into the undergrowth on the riverbank, only to recoil in horror when she feels the cold, dead hand of a corpse. It is the body of Philip. When Ernest returns to his uncle's house, he discovers that the violin has mysteriously fallen from a high shelf onto the floor and now lies 'shivered into splinters' (115). These fragments are placed in Philip's coffin: 'The dead man and his fiddle were lowered together into the grave' (115).

The queerness of Marsh's text lies in the manner in which it poses questions about the nature of the relationship between Ernest and Philip, moving playfully between apparent exposure and staunch reticence about

the nature of their relationship.⁴¹ While Ernest is presented as a run-of-the-mill, unremarkable young Englishman, the character of Philip Coursault lies somewhere between an archetypal tortured Romantic and a pathologized degenerate worthy of Max Nordau. Ernest describes him as a 'genius [. . .] struggling with insanity' (109), 'wild' and 'quite mad' (95). His French surname aligns him with the excesses of Parisian Decadence (always already tainted by the threat of sexual deviancy in the moralistic imagination of the Victorian middle class). The text characterizes him throughout in terms that insist on his outsider status and abnormality: he is 'erratic' (98), 'eccentric' (111) and 'strange' (95) in ways that are never fully explicated. To the proprietor of the rag-and-bone shop he is the 'the queerest-looking little chap ever I see' (107). In casting Philip in this manner, the text also implicitly invokes the associations between musicality and compromised masculinity – explored in Chapter 1 – prevalent in London in the early 1890s.

Ernest's desire for Philip is fleetingly suggested by small physical tics that the narrator, his uncle, invariably interprets in other ways. After Ernest sombrely recounts that Philip has 'vanished into thin air', for example, the narrator observes 'a suggestive twitching about the corners of Ernest's lips' (97). This he attributes to Ernest being irritated by a suspicion that his uncle's servant is 'guilty of what may be politely termed a subterfuge' (97). An alternative way of reading this is as a physical externalization – a 'twitch' of the famous 'stiff upper lip' of English reserve – revealing the depth of Ernest's feelings for the missing Philip. It is Ernest who is, in fact, guilty of 'subterfuge'. Other aspects of the text hint at the queer implications of Ernest's desire for Philip in a more oblique manner. The narrator's paranoia about queer desire becomes displaced, for example, in the text's presentation of his exploration of London's slum geography, in a manner that imbues the cityscape with fears of abject sexual activity. Ernest and his uncle travel to Lisson Grove – then an area of London's Marylebone notorious for crime and poverty – through a 'dirty night' (105) in their search for a 'dirty shop, in a dirty street' (94), 'poking out of one hole and into another' (105). 'I should think we must have penetrated at least half a dozen' (105), he observes. The city's labyrinthine and disorienting back alleys become figured as the 'dirty' recesses of the body, 'hole[s]' to be 'penetrated' and 'poke[d]' by perverse nocturnal flâneurs.

At times, Marsh's text seems to playfully foreground music and touch as means of 'outing' hidden queer desires. Ernest responds in frustration as he listens to the violin's ghostly music emanating from

behind a locked door: 'He's in hiding. Come, you rogue, where are you? We know you're here, Philip. Do you think I don't know your touch, and that queer song of yours? Come out, you beggar!' (102). As this suggests, queer desire in Marsh's text is transmitted not just through the aural experience of music – 'that queer song of yours' – but also through the 'knowledge' of touch. Such transmission occurs in two ways: in the act of handling the material body of the violin, and in the act of listening for the touch of the violinist, made evident in the tone of the music that his instrument produces. Much is made in Marsh's story of the fact that Ernest is haunted by the repetition of a 'quaint' (109) song that Philip had composed for him. In both its insistent repetitiveness and its apparent threat to reveal some queer sexual secret, the song functions as an example of the uncanny familiar from any number of tales in the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic tradition. The 'unpublished' (101) status of this song affords to it a sense of intimacy: it represents a message to be communicated only from Philip to Ernest; it is not motivated by commercial gain; it serves not as a commodity but as a gift from one man to the other. The text draws particular attention to the mysterious symbolic status of this song by having Ernest pose, on two separate occasions, the question 'I wonder why he always plays that tune?' (110, 113). On the first occasion, the narrator tartly comments that '[he] was unable to supply the information' (110). The eventual solution, made clear at the story's denouement, is that the song is leading Ernest to the body of Philip. Yet by repeating the question, the text teasingly invites the reader to ascribe a queerer interpretation to the music's insistent repetitions: Ernest is haunted by the music because it stands as a memorial of the 'pleasantest days' (113) that the men spent together, serving as a mode of transmission for a desire that must remain spectral because it cannot otherwise be openly expressed.

In a similar manner, when the narrator observes that 'Where the Willow Casts Its Shade' is a 'rather curious title for a song' (104), the text knowingly invites the reader to speculate about this song's queer significance. Evocations of 'willows' and 'shade' are, of course, something of a poetic cliché for evoking the melancholy of lost love (see for, example, Christina Rossetti's 'In the Willow Shade' (1881)). In this respect, the song could be viewed within a long tradition in which the inexpressibility of queer desire sees it associated with loss and loneliness.⁴² Yet the text may also gesture to an alternative tradition, epitomized by William Davenant's 'Under the Willow-Shades' (1668), in which two lovers 'embrace unspied' under the 'privacy supplied' by the surrounding willow trees.⁴³ The song

might be seen, paradoxically, to stage a revelation of the need for Ernest and Philip's queer desire to remain secret.

Queer desire is transmitted not only through the encoded medium of music but, as this story reminds us, also in the tactile interactions between bodies and musical instruments. In the specific case of the violin, the sense of intimacy between body and instrument may arise from the fact that the fingers of the left hand have direct contact with the strings of the violin as they are stopped against the fingerboard. Whereas in playing the piano, the fingers merely trigger the mechanism of the escapement that leads a hammer to hit a string, here there is direct contact between the fingers of the violinist and the mechanism through which the instrument produces sound. This intimacy accounts for the fact that the violin is often presented as a prosthesis: the instrument merges with the body of the player, incorporated into their sense of self. This prosthetic instrument makes the boundaries of the desiring self more affectively porous: the musician's touch flows from the fingers into the instrument, from which it is broadcast into the world. In D. H. Lawrence's *The Trespasser* (1912), for example, the violinist Siegmund is described as having 'infused [his violin] with his life, till its fibres had been as the tissue of his own flesh':

Grasping his violin, he seemed to have his fingers on the strings of his heart [...] It was his little beloved that drank his being and turned it into music [...] During the last nights of the season, when Siegmund's fingers had pressed too hard, when Siegmund's passion, and joy, and fear had hurt, too, the soft body of his little beloved, the violin had sickened for rest.⁴⁴

Through his touch on the violin Siegmund becomes, as Freud puts it in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), a 'prosthetic God': his violin becomes a direct extension of his body, channelling from his fingers his desiring 'being' into music and facilitating its dispersal to those who listen.⁴⁵ In a typically Lawrencian fantasy of erotic domination, the violin is figured as a passive body – 'his little beloved' – to be 'hurt' and 'sickened' into submission, its distinct material identity overcome by and enfolded into Siegmund's sense of self.

In Marsh's text, attention is repeatedly drawn to the touch of Ernest's hands on Philip's violin. Ernest's insistence on such tactile contact is explained by the nature of Philip's relationship with the object: the violin was to him, Ernest notes, 'his first love, and his last', akin to his 'mother, father, wife, and friend' (99). Indeed, when Philip abandons his instrument in the rag-and-bone shop, he solemnly kisses it farewell. Such intimacy between Philip and his violin sees his desiring touch marked on

the material body of his instrument, leaving a permanent trace. For Ernest to touch this violin is, then, to feel on his own body something of Philip's touch embedded within this object. 'A genuine musician', the narrator observes, 'always does handle a fiddle – even a common fiddle – with a sort of reverence' (94). Yet Ernest's attempt to ascertain the provenance of the violin invests this moment with a sensuousness that goes beyond mere connoisseurship: '[h]e rapped its back softly with his knuckles; he peeped into its belly; he smelt it; he tucked it under his chin' (94). Ernest's gentle attentiveness to the object before him – its shape, its smell, its touch to the flesh – sees him handle it with a sensuousness afforded to the body of a lover. As Ernest proceeds to speculate as to the violin's origins, the text insists on his continued compulsive tactile connection with the object as he stands 'turning it over and over' (94). When Ernest's suspicions about the violin are finally confirmed, the text once again draws attention to his tactile contact with the instrument: Ernest 'hold[s] the fiddle in front of him *with both his hands*, glaring at it as if it were a ghost' (103, italics added).

We might usefully enrich our understanding of this text's preoccupation with interactions between bodies and musical objects through a brief gesture towards theoretical insights from new historicism and new materialism. As Stephen Greenblatt has noted, certain material objects attain a powerful 'resonance' not solely due to their aesthetic value but because 'of use, the imprint of the human body on the artefact'.⁴⁶ Bill Brown's 'Thing Theory' has similarly drawn attention to the manner in which the interaction between subject's bodies and inanimate objects dissolves clear distinctions between subject and object.⁴⁷ This interaction, Brown suggests, transforms objective, material objects into 'things'. As Bruno Latour has insisted, 'things do not exist without being *full of people*' (italics added): maintaining a rigid division between subject and object obscures patterns of circulation, transference, translation and displacement between bodies and the material objects with which they interact.⁴⁸ In this respect, the interaction between a musical instrument and its player may transform that instrument into *thingness*, imprinting onto it aspects of the player's self through tactile contact.

Particularly useful for considering the manner in which the touch of an instrumentalist leaves its trace on the material body of an instrument is Thomas Hardy's poem 'Haunting Fingers: A Phantasy in a Museum of Musical Instruments' (1921).⁴⁹ Hardy's poem stages a nocturnal conversation between a group of melancholic musical instruments lying abandoned and unplayed in a museum. As they bemoan their 'voiceless,

crippled, corpselike state' (line 15), they still feel 'past handlers clutch them' (line 9) and 'old players' dead fingers touch them' (line 11). Despite the fact that these musicians are now 'shrunk in the tomb' (line 12), their tactile interactions – the 'tender pat' of 'aery fingers-tips' (lines 25–26) on a harpsichord, for instance – remain imprinted in their instruments. Tim Armstrong has suggested that this tactile imprint represents something akin to 'the newly opened space of recorded music'.⁵⁰ Yet it is surely significant that Hardy's instruments are haunted not by the strains of music that they once produced, but rather by the tactile interactions they once shared with their players: it is not music that is 'recorded' on these instruments, but touch. The pathos of Hardy's poem lies in its focus on the sense of loss engendered by the withdrawn intimacy of tactile contact: these instruments once felt loved and cherished by the touches they received, but now they desire only a release from the materiality – the 'glossy gluey make' (line 3) – upon which this touch is inscribed. Within the context of Marsh's story, for Ernest to hold Philip's violin in his hands is to thus experience the transmission of Philip's touch from one body to the other, through the intermediary of the violin upon which his touch is marked.

The intimacy of the queer touch is also implied in Marsh's text through Ernest's recognition of Philip's musical 'touch' on the violin: the particular musical tone produced by Philip's violin as he plays. When quizzed by his uncle as to how he can be sure that the music he hears is played by Philip, Ernest replies assertively: 'I know his touch' – characterizing his style of playing, in terms that invoke tactile contact, as 'very soft and delicate, but instinct with a strength, and a force, and a passion' (102). The bluntness of Ernest's statement invites the reader to dwell on its queer ambiguities: in referring simply to 'his touch' rather than, say, 'his touch upon the violin', the text allows for Philip's touch on the violin to be conflated with his touch on Ernest's body. At the story's denouement, the text contrasts the intimate, sensuous touch communicated between Ernest and Philip through music with Minnie's ghastly experience of feeling the touch of Philip's dead hand. The touch of Philip's dead hand acts here to frustrate the heterosexual imperative underlying Ernest's and Minnie's courtship, reasserting instead the primacy of the queer touch between Ernest and Philip, made vibrant through the tactile interactions associated with music and musical instruments in Marsh's text.

In the pornographic novel *Teleny*, music is similarly experienced in tactile terms as facilitating the transmission of the queer touch between bodies. Here, the piano operates as a technology that allows for touch to be

broadcast through space, bringing into contact the bodies of the instrumentalist and the listener. As Steven Connor notes, understandings of the senses in the long nineteenth century were produced by the technologies that reproduced them: the development of the phonograph and telephone altered the way in which sound was perceived, just as the photograph and (latterly) the cinema revolutionized modes of visual perception.⁵¹ The piano itself might be understood in similar terms as a technology that reproduced not just the sound of a score, but also the musician's touch. In doing so, it advanced new modes of perceiving touch as spatially mobile: a sense that was traditionally perceived as proximate could now be experienced as moving through space, made evident by the music through which it was transmitted. As Connor has suggested, tactile perception 'becomes recruited to experiences that are [...] auditory, insofar as [they] involve the sharing or transmission of impulses rather than their localization'.⁵²

The phenomenology of tactile pianism evoked in *Teleny* can be understood as the product of changes in both musical technologies and performance practices. The mechanical development of the piano over the nineteenth century certainly allowed for its increased sensitivity to the touch of the instrumentalist.⁵³ As Mine Doğantan-Dack has noted, descriptions of modes of touch became increasingly central both to treatises on piano technique and to composers' performance directions towards the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ Tobias Matthay's *The Art of Touch in All Its Diversity* (1903), for example, demarcates forty-two distinct modes of touching the piano.⁵⁵ This profusion of tactile metaphors seems to relate less to any empirically measurable interaction between instrumentalist and piano than to the manner in which the sensation of touch became central to the phenomenological experience of musical performance.⁵⁶

The emergence of the solo piano recital, along with performance practices that placed the pianist's hands in full view, likewise acted to train audiences to look and listen for the musician's touch.⁵⁷ The term 'recital' had first been used by Franz Liszt for a number of his 1840 London concerts. He himself believed that a concert he gave in Rome towards the end of 1839 was the first true solo recital and announced with pride to his friend Princess Belgiojoso that he could say, after Louis XIV, that 'Le concert c'est moi' ('I am the concert!').⁵⁸ The virtuoso pianism displayed by Teleny is best understood as a response to the particular cultural moment of London in the 1890s in which a feverish cult of celebrity developed around the flamboyant Polish concert pianist Jan Paderewski. There are some similarities between the two figures: the text makes much

of the quasi-Oriental sexual allure of the Hungarian Teleny's Eastern European origins. Yet in many respects Teleny is more conventionally masculine than his Polish equivalent: Paderewski was notorious for the androgyny of his huge bouffant head of hair, while *Teleny* goes to considerable lengths to distinguish its virile queer protagonists from 'effete, womanish men'.⁵⁹

Teleny is notable for presenting Des Grieux's eroticized experience of a piano recital in a manner that elides the aural perception of musical performance with the visual and tactile.⁶⁰ Teleny's music is afforded an ability to heighten the intensity of multisensory perception: Des Grieux is rendered '[s]pellbound by that soft music, which sharpened every sense' (4). The music's mesmeric power to provoke such sensory excess is rendered by the sentence's insistent sibilance. As he listens to Teleny's virtuoso performance, his 'whole body [. . .] convulse[s] and writhe[s] with mad desire' (5). For Des Grieux, this erotic charge is attributable not just to the music he hears, but also to the visual connection between him and Teleny: the 'lingering, slumberous look' that he perceives as being cast in his direction by the pianist (4). As the music progresses towards its climax, Des Grieux experiences this musical performance also through a fantasy of tactile contact:

[S]uddenly a heavy hand seemed to be laid upon my lap, something was bent and clasped and grasped, which made me faint with lust. The hand moved up and down, slowly at first, then faster and faster it went in rhythm with the song. My brain began to reel as throughout every vein a burning lava coursed, and then, some drops even gushed out – I panted –

All at once the pianist finished his piece with a crash amidst the thundering applause of the whole theatre. (5)

Here, the hands of the virtuoso pianist as they 'crash' on the keys of the piano in front of him are experienced as if displaced onto the body of the listener. The spectral masturbatory hand that moves 'up and down', then 'faster and faster', in 'rhythm' to the music in Des Grieux's lap mirrors the hands of Teleny that he sees playing before him on the keyboard. Listening enraptured to the sound of the music, his gaze fixed firmly on the player before him, Des Grieux feels the touch of Teleny's hands transmitted by the piano through the space that divides them, bringing their bodies into direct physical contact. After the concert, when Des Grieux and Teleny first meet, the text once again draws attention to the erotic significance of such tactile contact between them. Des Grieux recounts that when Teleny 'stretched forth his ungloved hand', he 'pulled off both [his] gloves' so as to

'put my bare hand into his'. 'Who has not been sentient', Des Grieux asks, 'of the manifold feelings produced by the touch of a hand?', before proceeding to present a lengthy catalogue of tactile interactions that seemingly allow for the demarcation of the class, health and character of the subject in hand (7). Finally, he concludes with a paean to the 'thrill' awakened by feeling his hand in touch with that of Teleny's:

There is, moreover, the magnetic hand, which seems to have a secret affinity for your own; its simple touch thrills your whole nervous system, and fills you with delight.

How can I express all that I felt from the contact of Teleny's hand? It set me on fire; and, strange to say, it soothed me at the same time. How sweeter, softer, it was than any woman's kiss. I felt his grasp steal slowly over all my body, caressing my lips, my throat, my breast; my nerves quivered from head to foot with delight, then it sank downwards into my reins, and Priapus, re-awakened, uplifted his head. (7)

Here, once again, Teleny's touch attains a mobility that allows the touch of the hand to be felt on other areas of the body, spatially displaced in a manner that recalls the touch of Teleny's hand on the piano. Teleny's handshake is experienced as being channelled through Des Grieux's body 'into [his] reins' to perform an act of masturbatory stimulation, akin to that experienced in the concert hall.

The thrill of tactile contact is likewise central to Forster's short story 'Dr Woolacott', in which the homoerotic fantasy of sensuous touch between bodies is aligned with the touch of the hand on the violin, its music an aural externalization of queer desire.⁶¹ 'Dr Woolacott' is the story of a young upper-class 'chronic invalid', Clesant, visited at his manor house by an attractive farmhand (86). Clesant elusively describes the condition from which he suffers as 'functional', 'nothing organic', admitting that he is 'sick of being myself perhaps!' (84). In this respect, Forster's text aligns his illness with prevalent pathological constructions of deviant sexuality. Clesant obediently complies with the orders of the eponymous Dr Woolacott to 'avoid all excitement', not play his violin and not physically assert himself. Most importantly, he must not be 'intimate with people' (84). Meanwhile, the handsome labourer conveys to Clesant his distinct distrust of Dr Woolacott: 'he never makes anyone well' (90). As he gradually awakens Clesant's vitality, seducing him into 'intimacy' and 'love', it becomes clear that this mysterious stranger is, in fact, the spectre of a soldier, killed on the battlefields of France. This farmhand succumbed to his injuries in a French military hospital, having refused Woolacott's

attempts to 'patch [him] up' (96). At the story's conclusion, Clesant himself dies in a passionate embrace with the farmhand, just as Woolacott arrives on the scene in an attempt to 'save' him.

While Forster's story was read by early critics as a 'record of despair' that 'treats homosexuality as a disease that separates the sufferer from life', the text is better understood as an indictment of those – such as Dr Woolacott – who pathologize non-normative desire and seek to enforce a death-in-life existence by curtailing its expression.⁶² Clesant's illness is the *product* of his sexual repression, not a symptom of his sexual abnormality. Forster needed look no further than Symonds's self-authored case study in *Sexual Inversion* for such a medical model. Here Symonds recalls that he 'rapidly recovered his health' only upon allowing himself to 'indulge his inborn homosexual instincts'.⁶³ Dr Woolacott's prohibition on Clesant's musical activities in this text reflects a late nineteenth-century tradition that afforded to certain forms of music – particularly Wagner's music – a pathological ability to awaken intense and destabilizing erotic desires.⁶⁴ Yet just as the text ultimately rejects Woolacott's tyrannical, destructive control over Clesant's desiring body, it also affirms the musical *jouissance* of a quasi-Wagnerian *Liebestod*.

Forster's text repeatedly emphasizes Clesant's frustrated desire for tactile contact. When the farmhand first sits on the sofa on which Clesant lies, Clesant is closely attentive to his sensation of the farmhand's nearby body: 'his weight sent a tremor, the warmth and sweetness of his body began casting nets' (88). While their bodies remain at a distance, Clesant nevertheless dwells on the thrill of sensing a 'tremor' that communicates the physicality of the farmhand's body. He is attentive also to those other sensory experiences afforded by close bodily proximity, temperature and smell: the 'warmth' and 'sweetness' of the farmhand's corporeal presence. Such sensory perceptions are presented as being transmitted enticingly out of the farmhand's body into the world that surrounds him, 'casting nets' into the space that divides him from Clesant, in order to bring their bodies into closer contact. It is unsurprising then that the text emphasizes the significance of tactile contact in its presentation of those moments of long-desired erotic consummation: the encroaching movement of a hand, being held in another's arms, clinging to the farmhand's 'broad shoulders' (89), limbs 'intertwined' (95) or 'entwined' (96), hands that 'gripped' (95) one another. When Clesant reflects on the apparent foolishness of allowing his health to be upset by his desire for the farmhand, he scolds himself: 'that's what comes of being kind to handsome strangers and *wanting to touch them*' (92, italics added). Even the text's naming of this young

man – ‘I’m one of your farm-hands’ (86) – draws attention to a manual dexterity that promises tactile contact.

Forster’s diaries from later in his life repeatedly return to what he saw as the ‘lustful idea’ at the core of ‘Dr Woolacott’: a ‘sick youth’ overwhelmed by the sensuous touch of a working-class man. An entry in Forster’s ‘Locked Diary’ in March 1965 described an ‘unwritten spasm’ that ‘came back to [him] after 30 or more years’: ‘Sick youth lies in bed, strong one cleans window, their eyes meet. Strong one comes in when the nurse goes, kneels by bed, slips his hand deep into it to caress what he finds there, stabs it and kills, their mouths touching.’⁶⁵ A similar recollection is noted in March 1966: ‘The old one of the invalid in the bed, and the young workman climbing in, slipping a hand down and killing him.’⁶⁶

At the same time as Clesant in ‘Dr Woolacott’ is revelling in the thrill of touching the farmhand’s body, his servants hear the sound of his violin echoing around his manor house:

The voices entered. They spoke of the sounds of the violin. The violin had apparently been heard playing in the great house the last half-hour, and no one could find out where it was. Playing all sorts of music, gay, grave and passionate. But never completing a theme. Always breaking off. A beautiful instrument. Yet so unsatisfying . . . Leaving the hearer much sadder than if it had never performed. What was the use (someone asked) of music like that? Better silence absolute than this aimless disturbance of our peace. (93)

Forster’s story is unusual in his oeuvre for its dreamlike, disorienting narrative style. In occupying Clesant’s point of view, it affords to the farmhand a tangible physical reality at some moments, only to later suggest that he is purely the fantastical product of Clesant’s feverish, deluded imagination. In this respect, the spectral violin music heard by the servants invites a number of possible interpretations, each of which elides queer tactile contact between bodies with the touch of the hands on the violin. Clesant indulges in the imaginative fantasy of touching the farmhand while simultaneously playing on his violin; the tactile contact between him and his instrument becomes akin, in itself, to touching this desired body. Alternatively, this music can be viewed as the *product* of the sensuous touch between Clesant and the farmhand, transforming the farmhand’s body into a violin to be played upon by Clesant’s eager hands. In either interpretation, the music stands as an aural externalization of Clesant’s experience of queer tactile contact.

In accounting for the text’s presentation of this music, it is necessary to note that it is reported from the perspective of Clesant’s servants. Implicated alongside Woolacott in maintaining the repressive medical

regime that traps Clesant in a joyless existence, they too wish to impose 'silence' rather than allowing for the articulation of desires that might effect an 'aimless disturbance' of Clesant's 'peace'. Forster's text alerts us in two ways to the fact that we need not share this view: firstly, by ascribing it not to the story's omniscient narrator but to 'someone' else; secondly, by creating a distinction between 'our peace' – that of an oppressive society – and the pleasure that Clesant himself discovers in this music.

In setting up an opposition between the celebration of sensuous, erotically charged music and the denigration of music that causes an 'aimless disturbance' and leaves its listeners feeling 'sad', Forster's text recalls, in particular, debates about the affective impact of the music of Richard Wagner.⁶⁷ The accusations that this music 'never complet[es] a theme' and is '[a]lways breaking off' sound similar to those levelled against formal aspects of Wagner's music by some anti-Wagnerians.⁶⁸ Interestingly, Forster completed his first draft of 'Dr Woolacott' only days after attending a performance of Wagner's *Parsifal* at Covent Garden on 17 May 1927.⁶⁹ The text's presentation of a sensuously charged touch facilitating a salvific release from a life tormented by desire finds some parallels with the end of Wagner's opera, in which Parsifal heals the wound of Amfortas with the touch of a conspicuously phallic spear. As Lawrence Dreyfus has noted, there was a well-established tradition in queer sub-communities of understanding *Parsifal* as a parable celebrating the superiority of intense quasi-erotic bonds between men, and, as Michelle Fillion has suggested, Forster's queer refashioning of the Parsifal myth in *The Longest Journey* (1907) can be profitably understood in these terms.⁷⁰

Yet Forster's affirmation of erotic self-abandonment at the text's conclusion has more in common with the philosophy of *Liebestod* underpinning Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* than with the ethic of renunciation demanded by *Parsifal*. It is curious to note that Forster first attended Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* – his first experience of opera – at Covent Garden in June 1898 with Dr Wilmot Herringham.⁷¹ It seems likely that the character of Dr Woolacott draws upon – even if subconsciously – Dr *Wilmot* Herringham, whose first name bears a curious resemblance in its patterning of sounds.⁷² Herringham, like the character of Woolacott, was a military doctor who served in the First World War: between 1914 and 1919 he was consultant physician to the British forces in France as a member of the Royal Army Medical Corps.⁷³ From a purely biographical perspective, it is interesting to speculate as to why Forster conflates Herringham with a character who seeks to frustrate the expression of queer sexual desire. It may be the case that the young Forster had a

conversation with Herringham similar to that which his fictional Maurice has with his family doctor, Dr Barry. When Maurice confesses that he is ‘an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort’, Barry responds in disgust: ‘Rubbish, rubbish! [...] who put that lie into your head? You whom I see and know to be a decent fellow! We’ll never mention it again. No – I’ll not discuss. I’ll not discuss. The worst thing I could do for you is discuss it.’⁷⁴ Barry’s dismissive response to Maurice’s desire to openly articulate his queer sexual desire – ‘Rubbish, rubbish’ – finds echoes with the anecdote from Forster’s time in Egypt that opens this chapter. As Forster burrows through the ‘rubbish’ while at the piano on stage in Montazah he discovers a bodily gesture that allows him to counteract a deeply embedded sense of sexual shame.

‘Dr Woolcott’, like ‘The Violin’ and *Teleny*, is a text in which embodied encounters with musical instruments serve to bring queer bodies into contact by facilitating an experience of tactile transmission. In other works of the period, the sense of visceral materiality afforded by tactile contact with a musical instrument functions to affirm the subjectivity of those who otherwise experience their embodied self as fragile and precarious.

‘Fingers Caressing Her Own’: Tactile Embodiment at the Piano

Unless I can stretch and touch something hard, I shall be blown down the eternal corridors for ever. What then can I touch? What brick, what stone? and so draw myself across the enormous gulf into my body safely?

Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (1931)⁷⁵

An examination of the significance of the musical touch in Forster’s *A Room with a View* and Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* permits a consideration of the manner in which the physical act of touching the piano allows for the emergence of a sense of subjectivity that more securely inhabits the corporeal body. Both novels explore the attempts of young women to arrive at a less precarious sense of their embodied subjectivity in a manner that speaks powerfully to the concerns of much contemporary queer and feminist theory. Judith Butler’s observation that the manner in which the ‘body [is] encountered, and how [it is] sustained, depends fundamentally on the social and political networks in which this body lives’ can be seen as representative of the insights of a broad range of theorists working in new materialist and phenomenological traditions.⁷⁶ In these novels, tactile encounters between bodies and objects sustain a surer ontological foundation – even if only momentarily – for subjects who so

often feel cast adrift. The accounts of pianism presented here are best understood in the context of what the American music critic James Huneker termed the ‘piano girl’, the stereotypical nineteenth-century daughter who plays the instrument by way of social accomplishment, providing ‘a magnificent stop-gap for the creaking pauses of the drawing-room machinery’.⁷⁷ As Ruth Solie has suggested, such musical performance – what she describes as ‘girthing’ at the parlour piano – acted as a technology of social regulation: it served to ‘form girls appropriate to the needs of the society they live in’, demonstrating ‘their own enactment – or, in Butler’s terms, their performance – of girlhood’ in the light of such gendered expectations.⁷⁸ The nineteenth-century novel – from Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1815) to Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) – offers countless examples of the piano as a site at which ideals of conventional female subjectivity are reinforced.⁷⁹

Recent work by Michelle Fillion and Emma Sutton, on Forster and Woolf respectively, has done much to highlight the manner in which these texts challenge the stereotypes of the genteel ‘piano girl’. In *A Room with a View* and *The Voyage Out* piano performance becomes a forum for exploring alternative models of female embodied subjectivity.⁸⁰ Both Lucy Honeychurch and Rachel Vinrace play the first movement of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 32, Op. 111, a notoriously challenging work that presents considerable technical and interpretative difficulties. The first movement includes a startlingly disjointed opening melodic line, played in octaves in the bass register of the piano; a deferred announcement of the tonic key at the start of the work; and a leap of five and a half octaves; and is defined by a highly chromatic and harmonically ambiguous structure based on diminished-seventh chords.⁸¹ Frederick Niecks, an English music critic writing in 1904, characterized the work as ‘all iron firmness, irresistible energy, and inflexible determination’, while Forster himself – in ‘The C Minor of That Life’ (1941) – evoked the sonata’s opening as a ‘dive into the abyss’.⁸² Both Fillion and Sutton draw our attention to the manner in which this music was gendered. In her reading of Forster’s text, Michelle Fillion traces parallels between what she sees as a ‘Hegelian synthesis’ of ‘masculine and feminine principles’ in the sonata and the narrative of Forster’s text.⁸³ In similar terms, Emma Sutton suggests in her reading of *The Voyage Out* that Rachel reclaims repertoire which was ‘unequivocally perceived as “masculine”’.⁸⁴ Yet this overlooks the curious fact that this sonata held specific queer resonances for listeners in homosexual subcultures around the time of the publication of these novels. Edward Prime-Stevenson notes in *The Intersexes* that ‘Beethoven’s

beautiful sonata, Opus 111, is often called among German and Austrian Uranians, “The Uranian Sonata”, from some legendary “in-reading” of the work.’ The sonata, Prime-Stevenson suggests, is a musical expression of Beethoven’s ‘idealized homosexuality’, reflecting upon the ‘real passion’ that Beethoven felt in his ‘sad last days’ for his ‘unworthy nephew Carl’.⁸⁵ Work by Sutton and Fillion has done much to historicize the associations of Beethoven’s music and its implications for the gender politics of these novels, yet it has generally overlooked the manner in which playing music forms part of these texts’ much broader concern with the affirmation of embodied subjectivity. Renewed attention to the presentation of musical touch in these texts might provide alternative, queerer perspectives on the manner in which the desiring self comes into being through tactile interactions.

In *A Room with a View*, Forster posits the propensity to experience music-making through tactile sensation as the mark of ‘every true performer’ (29). The pleasure that Lucy Honeychurch gains from playing Beethoven and Schumann at the piano is attributed as much to her sensation of touching the instrument as it is to the sounds that she produces: ‘she was intoxicated by the mere feel of the notes: they were fingers caressing her own; and by touch, not by sound alone, did she come to her desire’ (29). For Lucy, the piano on which she plays becomes akin to a receptive body, the keys transformed into fingers that lovingly respond to her own touch with a gentle ‘caress’. As Mi Zhou has suggested, it is precisely the physicality of Lucy’s piano playing that generates her ‘intoxication’ through allowing her a greater awareness of her own body and senses.⁸⁶ Yet Lucy’s simultaneous experience of touching and being touched also calls to mind Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s classic account of the ‘double sensation’ – the right hand touching the left – that serves to unsettle the boundary between the touching subject and the touched object. For Merleau-Ponty, this chiasmic ‘reversibility of the flesh’ means that subject and object mutually participate in the process of perception.⁸⁷ The piano both is receptive to touch and responds with its own touch. This chiasmic tactile interaction with the piano allows Lucy to more securely inhabit the desiring materiality of her body as it becomes entangled with and affirmed by the wider object world that surrounds her.

Lucy’s intensely tactile experience of Beethoven’s work anticipates that of Roland Barthes, for whom the pleasure of musical performance ‘comes from an activity that is very little auditory, being above all manual’. This, he suggests, is particularly true of Beethoven’s music. Barthes links this tangibility to the composer’s deafness, suggesting that Beethoven’s music

contains something ‘inaudible (something for which hearing is not the *exact* locality)’: it is ‘not abstract or inward, but [. . .] endowed [. . .] with a tangible intelligibility, with the intelligible as tangible’.⁸⁸ What Lucy and Barthes share is a sense that certain forms of knowledge become most accessible through the sensual experience of touch. Lucy enters a ‘more *solid* world when she open[s] the piano’ (italics added). While the pedantic Mr Beebe might warn against the apparently emotionally destabilizing influence of ‘too much Beethoven’ (36), Forster’s narrator insists that ‘Lucy never knew her desires so clearly as after music’ (37). It is through her embodied tactile experience of musical performance – her physical contact with the piano – that Lucy is ontologically grounded and epistemologically secure.

The physicality of Beethoven’s piano sonatas and their connection with an embodied self-affirmation are also evident in Forster’s discussion of his own pianism in ‘Not Listening to Music’ (1939).⁸⁹ Here Forster describes how he arrived at an understanding of Beethoven’s formal ingenuity not by the cold academic abstraction of what he dismisses as the ‘slough of “appreciation”’ – that is, passively listening to music (perhaps, like Tibby in *Howards End*, with ‘a full score on his knee’).⁹⁰ Rather, Forster relishes the insights afforded by the ‘physical approach’ of his hands on the piano, drawing attention to the tactile pleasures of Beethoven’s ‘sudden softnesses’.⁹¹ Such is the sustained concentration required to play Beethoven’s music that he is prevented from indulging in speculative mental ‘wool-gathering’. In focussing attention principally on the movements of the hands, rather than on the indulgent peregrinations of an ever-active mind, piano practice promotes a sense of humility: there is ‘no [. . .] thinking myself clever here’, Forster admits. A close familiarity with Beethoven’s sonatas from the perspective of a performer provides, Forster suggests, an education in the art of ‘construction’: ‘what becomes of a phrase, how it is transformed or returned, sometimes bottom upward’.⁹²

Forster’s *Howards End* likewise charts the tactile experience of music as connected to both an appreciation of thematic ‘construction’ and an awareness of one’s desiring body. Here, Forster’s narrator recounts a performance of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, charting a variety of listening practices – from Margaret’s focus on musical form, to Mrs Munt ‘tap[ping] [. . .] when the tunes come’, to Tibby’s score-fixated pedantry, to Helen’s insistent impressionism (26). In Helen’s conceptualization of Beethoven’s thematic development, she visualizes the notorious ‘goblins’ that inhabit the symphony’s Scherzo in terms that present the process of composition as one of dextrous manipulation: he ‘took hold of them, he

'gave them a little push', he sees them 'scattered' (28). Such is the intensity of Helen's imaginative engagement that the music – elided with the fantasies evoked by it – achieves for her a sense of physical immediacy: 'she even stretched out her gloved hands as if it was tangible' (28). For Helen, music is not just perceived audibly, but felt on the surface of the entire body: 'music *enwrapped* her', she rhapsodizes (27). Yet Forster's narrator maintains a quizzical ironic distance from such a stance. In an earlier manuscript draft of the novel of the novel, the sentence reads: 'she even stretched out her hands *in ecstasy to touch it*'.⁹³ The 'ecstasy' of the earlier text makes Helen's gesture more explicitly sensual. Forster's later revision adds a hint of the absurd. The gloves on her hands cover her skin, presenting a barrier to the tactile musical contact she apparently yearns for. The detail of her 'gloved hands' acts to ironize the romantic indulgence of her daydreams: Helen exists not in a fantastic world of 'stars', 'angels' and 'dancing elephants' but in one of mundane, upper-middle-class respectability (28). Elsewhere, Forster's revisions reinforce the significance of the tactile in Helen's experience of this music: in the final text, Helen concludes that the symphony's unequivocal 'meaning' amounts to 'a *tangible* statement' (29, italics added), while Forster's earlier draft has the more prosaic 'final statement'.⁹⁴

Helen's insistence on the 'tangible' intensity of lived experience reflects the broader concern of *Howards End* with the necessity of genuine contact between disparate individuals, families and classes, each with their own distinct world-view. 'Only connect . . .', the novel's epigraph famously demands (i). Early in the text, Margaret warns Helen of the 'great outer life' of 'telegrams and anger' that 'you and I have *never touched*' (23, italics added). While the rational level-headedness of Margaret's 'touch' of social connection is underpinned by her idealistic liberal humanism, Helen's desire to 'touch' is more viscerally embodied in her relationship with Leonard Bast.

If the touch of connection in *Howards End* ultimately becomes grounded in sexual desire and the physical body, *A Room with a View* can also be understood as exploring the way in which subjects come to inhabit a sense of their desiring embodied selves through tactile and haptic experiences. This novel follows the preoccupations of much of Forster's work in pitting systems of values that deny the body (associated here with the English, medieval and Gothic), against ones that embrace it (the Mediterranean, Renaissance and Greek). The forums available for the realization of one's embodiment in Forster's text are markedly restrained by gender expectations. George, Freddy and Mr Beebe swim naked with

childish joy in the 'sacred lake', their skin exposed to the touch of the water, air and vegetation that surround them (120). The 'call to the blood' (123) presented by such contact between the natural world and their bare flesh allows these men an opportunity to experience the feel of their bodies with a renewed intensity. Such a forum of bodily self-discovery does not lie open to Lucy, for whom the rigid expectations of genteel feminine behaviour prove a persistent constraint. Instead, as we have seen, she discovers a sense of her embodied existence in her wilful performances of Beethoven and Schumann at the piano.

The nature of Lucy's embodied experience at the piano is contingent also on her own sense of personal autonomy. The pleasure she takes in the tactile experience of Beethoven is connected partially with the wilfulness with which she frustrates the expectations of the repertoire appropriate for a genteel 'piano girl' to play: she eschews popular domestic favourites – the sentimental song 'Adelaide', the Turkish March from *The Ruins of Athens* – to play instead Beethoven's hugely technically challenging Piano Sonata No. 32. Later in *A Room with a View*, she is forced to play music from Wagner's *Parsifal* against her will, through a combination of her mother's stern invocation of 'duty' and her own sense of acute social embarrassment. Her physical experience of playing the piano is transformed: 'She liked music, but how much better tennis seemed. How much better to run about in *comfortable clothes* than to sit at the piano and *feel girt under the arms*' (145, italics added). The primary sense of Lucy's feeling of being 'girt' – belted up or buckled in – relates to her constrictive clothing, but it also invokes the manner in which musical performance acts to discipline her body. When it is demanded of her that she perform the role of the pliant domestic 'piano girl', her arms held aloft at the keyboard, Lucy's embodied experience of the piano changes markedly.

While in *A Room with a View*, Lucy's piano playing allows for a form of embodiment through which the desiring self might come to a fuller sense of consciousness, in *The Voyage Out*, tactile embodiment becomes a more pressingly fundamental question of the self's survival: Rachel's death at the text's conclusion is closely aligned with her inability to fully inhabit her own body. In Woolf's text, Rachel Vinrace's piano playing – the touch of her hands on the piano – operates as a strategy through which Rachel can experience her otherwise precarious self as securely embodied. The text connects Rachel's piano playing with ideas of spatial construction; she experiences playing music as akin to the creation of material architectural structures. In this sense, piano playing allows for a way of feeling secure in the situated boundaries of the material embodied self. The touch of the

hand on the keys of the piano forms part of a web of images in the text in which a grounded sense of embodied selfhood is connected with the tactile experience of the surrounding world. Reaching out to touch the world around her forms a tactile equivalent to the famous mirror scene in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), where Clarissa looks into her glass to '[collect] the whole of her at one point'.⁹⁵ In *The Voyage Out*, a sense of self is ascertained not through a moment of Lacanian *visual* self-identification, but rather through the tactile articulation of what Anzieu has called the 'skin ego'.⁹⁶ For Anzieu, human subjectivity is generated through touch; infantile tactile experiences lay the foundations of an ego that is rooted in the body and linked to the skin both as a boundary and as a receptive organ. In similar terms, Freud posited that the experience of touch plays an integral part in the formation of a stable sense of selfhood. In an intriguing footnote to *The Ego and the Id* (1923), added in 1927, he suggests that 'the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body'. The self is conceived as coming into being through the process of tactile interactions that demarcate the margins of the self through contact with the surrounding material world.⁹⁷

Music-making in Woolf's text is an activity that engages the surface of the physical body as much as the depths of the reflective mind. Indeed, for Rachel's Aunt Bessie, the physicality of her playing risks modifying Rachel's body in a manner that frustrates conventional expectations of female beauty. 'She is afraid that you will spoil your arms if you insist upon so much practising', reports Helen. 'The muscles of the forearm – and then one won't marry?', Rachel surmises (15). The text's first description of Rachel's piano playing reflects the physicality of her body's engagement with the piano:

She slammed the door of her room, and pulled out her music. It was all old music – Bach and Beethoven, Mozart and Purcell – the pages yellow, the engraving rough to the finger. In three minutes she was deep in a very difficult, very classical fugue in A, and over her face came a queer remote impersonal expression of complete absorption and anxious satisfaction. Now she stumbled; now she faltered and had to play the same bar twice over; but an invisible line seemed to string the notes together, from which rose a shape, a building. She was so far absorbed in this work, for it was really difficult to find how all these sounds should stand together, and drew upon the whole of her faculties, that she never heard a knock at the door. It was burst impulsively open, and Mrs. Dalloway stood in the room leaving the door open, so that a strip of the white deck and of the blue sea appeared through the opening. The shape of the Bach fugue crashed to the ground. (58–59)

The touch of the keys under her fingers, as the musical forms unfold before her, allows her to participate in an act of musical construction that is simultaneously an act of feeling into her own body, of constructing a sense of her embodied self. Woolf presents Rachel's 'complete absorption' while she is playing in terms that evoke bodily immersion: 'she was *deep in* a very difficult, very classical fugue'; '[s]he was so far *absorbed in* this work' (italics added). The embodied nature of Rachel's playing is evoked by the metaphors of architectural construction used to characterize the interaction between her body and the piano: from the 'invisible line' that 'string[s] the notes together' arises 'a shape, a building'; the sounds she produces must 'stand together'; when she is interrupted, the 'shape' of the Bach fugue 'crashed to the ground'. Rachel's hands at the piano are engaged in the creation of something that feels tangible; she experiences music not in terms of the sounds it makes, but rather in the feelings of spatial materiality that it evokes. Later in the novel, when Rachel once again plays Bach, music is experienced in such architectural terms as constructing 'a building with spaces and columns succeeding each other rising in the empty space' (187). Woolf presents the arrangement of musical scores in Rachel's room with similar imagery: 'books of music rose in two jagged pillars on the floor' (136). These 'pillars' provide at least some sense of a coherent, solid self, but hint nonetheless that this 'jagged' structure might collapse at any point. Indeed, at the novel's conclusion, as Rachel descends into the delirium of illness, Woolf's text presents her gradual loss of any spatial perception of her own body in terms that demolish the architectural constructions used to characterize her experience of piano playing: 'all landmarks were obliterated' (384).

Later in the text, Woolf presents Rachel's piano playing in similarly material terms: 'Up and up the steep spiral of a very late Beethoven sonata she climbed, like a person ascending a ruined staircase, energetically at first, then more laboriously advancing her feet with effort until she could go no higher and returned with a run to begin at the very bottom again' (339). Here, Rachel's experience of playing is once again characterized by its embodied physicality: the 'energetic' and 'laborious' ascent of a spatially demarcated 'steep spiral', a 'ruined staircase'. The force of Rachel's hands at the keyboard sees them transformed into the heavy, determined feet of a mountaineer. Beethoven's fragmented late style unfolds under her fingers to suggest a sense of the self that must somehow negotiate the precariousness of its own fragile, 'ruined' state. Woolf does not specify the identity of the work being played by Rachel here. However, as Sutton has noted, Woolf elsewhere implied that it was Beethoven's Op. 111 that she had in

mind.⁹⁸ It is a curious coincidence that Woolf's text is identical to Forster's in this choice of repertoire. Woolf had certainly read *A Room with a View*; she reviewed it favourably in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1908 while working on *The Voyage Out*. In this respect, Rachel's pianism may, to some extent, be understood as a response to that of Forster's Lucy.⁹⁹ We might also hear an echo in these passages of Vernon Lee's aesthetics of empathy, discussed in Chapter 2: Woolf presents Rachel as coming to comprehend musical form through close sensitivity to feelings of movement ('rising', 'succeeding', 'ascending', 'advancing'). As Dennis Denisoff and Kirsty Martin have observed, Lee's theories relating to aesthetic emotion prefigure the work of Bloomsbury's pre-eminent aesthetic theorists, Roger Fry and Clive Bell, on 'significant form'.¹⁰⁰ Woolf was often dismissive of Lee's works, generally on account of her apparently 'slack and untidy' style.¹⁰¹ Yet following the publication of Lee's *Music and Its Lovers* in 1932, she remarked upon Fry's acknowledgement that Lee had made a 'real contribution' to aesthetics.¹⁰² In *The Voyage Out*, Lee's presence can be gleaned in the way in which Rachel's sense of musical form hovers between the embodied and the abstract. Musical form is *felt* through the bodily rhythms of projection while being held at a distance through impersonal metaphors of externalized, concrete construction.

While the physicality of her touch allows Rachel a sense of her material body grounded in the world, her desire for tactile contact extends, in Woolf's text, beyond her hands on the keyboard to encompass other aspects of her engagement with the material world around her. Rachel dwells also on the feel of the sheet music from which she plays: 'old music – Bach and Beethoven, Mozart and Purcell – the pages yellow, *the engraving rough to the finger*' (58, italics added). Woolf's text also sets in contrast the active, controlled process of construction in which Rachel engages her hands while at the piano and the compulsive and repetitive movements of her fingers in other contexts. As she sits at the dinner table, her father observes her in a self-absorbed trance, her 'fingers still toying with the fossilized fish' (17). When her playing is interrupted by Clarissa Dalloway, she is left awkwardly 'fumbl[ing] her fingers in her lap' (58), as if her hands are still in some way still engaged at the keyboard. Terence can simultaneously praise her fingers as 'well shaped and competent' and observe that they are clearly the 'nervous fingers [...] of a musician' (238). When not immersed in the sense of embodied materiality afforded by her hands at the keyboard, Rachel is rendered ontologically vulnerable. Her 'nervous', 'fumbl[ing]' gestures register the fact that her subjectivity is

never quite secure without some firmer tactile grounding in her material surroundings.

In this respect, touch becomes particularly important when Rachel's precarious sense of her own selfhood feels somehow threatened. When she is called upon to account for herself by the politically radical, perpetually embattled Evelyn Murgatroyd, she responds by grounding herself in the physical reality of the objects that surround her. 'Are you real?', 'Do you *believe* in anything?', Evelyn demands. Rachel reacts by 'finger[ing] different objects' in the room that surrounds her: tables, books, photographs. She focusses, in particular, on the corporeality of a 'fleshly leaved plant' and the contrasting textures of its 'stiff bristles' and the 'large earthenware pot' in which it stands (290). Likewise, when Mrs Flushing invites Rachel to 'open [her wardrobe] and look at the things', she instead compulsively 'began to finger' the assortment of objects – fabrics, buttons, broaches – that lie before her (272).

Whereas the tactile experience of piano playing in Woolf's text promises for Rachel a certain security in the embodied self, the more purely cognitive experience of reading risks a disorienting sense of disembodiment. For Helen, Rachel's musical pursuits distract from her intellectual development: she 'desired that Rachel should think, and for this reason offered books and discouraged too entire a dependence on Bach and Beethoven and Wagner' (137). In turning from music to books, Rachel attempts to project into her act of reading the sense of tactile materiality she finds in her piano playing. The sentences she reads become 'possessed of shapes like tables and chairs' (137), and the books she handles are distinguished not only by their 'shiny yellow covers', but by the textured feel afforded by 'a great deal of gilding on the back' (137). Yet her cognitive experience of reading is defined by a disorienting sense of self-loss:

The morning was hot, and the exercise of reading left her mind contracting and expanding like the main-spring of a clock [. . .] It was all very real, very big, very impersonal, and after a moment or two she began to raise her first finger and to let it fall on the arm of her chair so as to bring back to herself some consciousness of her own existence. She was next overcome by the unspeakable queerness of the fact that she should be sitting in an arm-chair, in the morning, in the middle of the world. Who were the people moving in the house – moving things from one place to another? And life, what was that? It was only a light passing over the surface and vanishing, as in time she would vanish, though the furniture in the room would remain. Her dissolution became so complete that she could not raise her finger any more, and sat perfectly still, listening and looking always at the same spot. It became stranger and stranger. She was overcome with awe that things should exist at all . . . She forgot that she had any fingers to raise . . . (137–38)

It is through the gesture of her hand – the controlled movement of a pianist's finger – that she attempts to reclaim a sense of her own 'consciousness of her own existence'. She slowly restages the actions of her fingers at the keyboard, 'raising' and 'letting fall' her finger, as she determinedly attempts to reinhabit a sense of her physical body. The text sets in opposition this active process of tactile engagement and the entirely passive sensory experiences of 'listening' and 'looking'. As Rachel is gradually 'overcome' by a sense of the 'unspeakable queerness' of her mind as it seems to drift away from her body, this is marked by an inability to feel control over her fingers, and then ultimately a lack of awareness of those fingers' very existence. The possibility of recruiting tactile sensory experience in order to secure the self in the world slips from her grasp. If *A Room with a View* and *The Voyage Out* present the embodied intensity of musical experience as a strategy through which queer marginalized subjects might bolster their ontological security, Vernon Lee's writings turn instead to more insubstantial and ephemeral tactile connections.

'Things Long Untouched': Music and Tactile Connections in the Archive

How shall we, whose souls are aged and wrinkled with the long years
of humanity, shake hands across the centuries with those young-eyed,
young-limbed immortal children?

Symonds, *Studies in the Greek Poets*¹⁰³

For Lee, like Symonds, the desire for the formation of affective communities across time is expressed through a fantasy of tactile contact. While Symonds's hand extends to caress the 'young-limbed' bodies of idealized Greek youths, Lee's tactile engagement with the past is less conspicuously erotic. In Lee's writings on eighteenth-century Italian music, such a desire for connectedness is expressed through her tactile interactions with music's archival remains. Handling the dusty manuscript scores of long-lost Italian operas becomes, for Lee, a means of reaching out to recover a material remnant for affective resonances of the lost historical past. Yet her texts simultaneously acknowledge the frustrating impossibility of such connection: these scores remain only imperfect conduits for the transmission of the musical culture they represent and the modes of feeling that this culture embodies. As Martha Vicinus has observed, Lee's works are marked by a nostalgia which operates to displace 'her powerful homoerotic feelings onto an imagined past'.¹⁰⁴ Touch acts in Lee's writing to extend a hand towards a past that ultimately remains, so often, just out of reach.

Her tactile engagement with music's material relics enacts what David Sweeney Coombs – with reference to Lee's aesthetics of reading – has called 'intimate withholding': a 'motional dynamics [that] [...] paradoxically brings us into an intimate proximity with a perceptual object by holding us apart from it'.¹⁰⁵

Lee's preoccupation with feeling a sense of tactile connection with the past may usefully be read in the light of what Carolyn Dinshaw has called the 'queer touch'.¹⁰⁶ Dinshaw draws attention to modes of transhistorical affective connection that allow for the articulation of subjectivities that go beyond the restrictions of present-day identity classifications. The 'queer touch' acts to bring aspects of the historical past forward into the present, building an affective community between 'lives, texts, and other cultural phenomenon left out of sexual categories back then, and, on the other, those left out of current sexual categories now'.¹⁰⁷ In utilizing figures of tactile contact, Dinshaw is closely alert to the wish for embodied connectedness that often motivates queer subjects' desire for the formation of a transhistorical sense of community. The mode of affective historicism that Dinshaw advances also speaks directly to that propounded by Vernon Lee, Walter Pater and other aestheticist writers: the past is to be defended against what Lee describes as an over-intellectualized 'mere antiquarianism', motivated by an urge towards 'classification', which desiccates our capabilities to 'feel' into the past (*SEC* 295).¹⁰⁸ Dinshaw's work has also proved influential for those queer theorists, such as Heather Love, who wish to account for those texts that investigate the failure of such affective connections.¹⁰⁹ Understood in this light, the queerness of Lee's work has less to do with any articulation of alternative sexual subjectivities than with the pervasive sense of loss that inhabits her affective engagement with eighteenth-century Italy.

Lee's most sustained engagement with the affective nature of her historicism is seen in her essay 'In Praise of Old Houses' (1892).¹¹⁰ Here, the historical past becomes a productive forum in which new modes of feeling spaces can be realized: the 'historical habit' allows us, Lee suggests, to '[supplement] our present life by a life of the past; a life larger, richer than our own, multiplying our emotions by those of the dead' (29). Such engagement guards against the isolation and loneliness of the present by forming communities across time: it represents a 'the sense of being companioned by the past', of existing in a 'place warmed for our living by the lives of others' (29). Paradoxically, here the bodies of the dead radiate a warmth that may be felt on the skin of the living. For Lee, the past is 'somehow more companionable, warmer, more full of flavour'

(36) than the ‘chilly, draughty, emptiness’ (30) that defines her experience of modernity. Lee presents this intense ‘rapture’ for the past in terms that afford to it a sense of displaced queer erotic desire. It is, Lee suggests, ‘not easy to describe’, having its ‘origins far down in mysterious depths of our nature’; it ‘arises overwhelmingly from many springs, filling us with the throb of vague passions welling from our most vital parts’ (34–35). It is unsurprising, then, that Lee experiences her historicism as a process of tactile connection:

I feel [...] that I am in contact with a whole living, breathing thing, full of habits of life, of suppressed words; a sort of odd, mysterious, mythical, but very real creature; as if, in the dark, I stretched out my hand and met something (but without any fear), something absolutely indefinable in shape and kind, but warm, alive. This changes solitude in unknown places into the reverse of solitude and strangeness. (31)

The historical queer touch is one that can overcome the ‘fear’ of contact to form a sense of community built upon those vague, unspeakable feelings and those ‘suppressed words’ that lurk at the edge of the expressible. It is a community so ephemeral, delicate and tentative that it offers to transform ‘solitude’ not into its forcefully articulated opposite, but only into the ‘reverse of solitude’.

Lee’s first book, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, similarly alert to the possibility of historical affective connection, is much concerned with ideas of music, loss and modes of historical recovery.¹¹¹ Her project is motivated by what Lee describes, in the preface to the second edition of the work, as a ‘passion for actually seeing and touching the things of that time’ – an ‘odd mania’ that leads her to ‘hanker after archives and scores’ (*SEC* xxi). Yet it is marked by what she describes as ‘a sort of sadness which should not belong to historians or aestheticians’ (*SEC* 294). Her enthusiasm for the Italian eighteenth century has, in its own way, tactile beginnings at the keyboard: ‘How it arose would be difficult to explain’, Lee recounts elsewhere, ‘perhaps mainly from the delight which I received from the melodies of Mozart and Gluck, *picked out with three fingers on the piano*’.¹¹² Lee’s writing is particularly alert to how feelings of historical connectedness are sustained through tactile contact channelled between and through bodies. Unlike in the case of those historical periods, such as the Renaissance, that lie in the distant past, she observes, one can still meet – and *touch* – those who have known the musicians and artists of eighteenth-century Italy. Lee is particularly thrilled to recall her meeting with ‘that sweet and sunny lady, whose hand, which pressed ours, had pressed the hands of Fanny Burney’ (*SEC* 294). The ‘pressed’ hand forms

an impression on the flesh that allows it to be transmitted from one body to another, bringing Lee into closer contact with Burney, the daughter of Charles Burney, the music historian who forms the focus of Lee's account. The warmth of touch is passed from hand to hand across time, affirming a sense of shared fellowship by closing the gap of historical distance.

This openness to the communicative potential of tactile contact extends to Lee's engagement with the archive. A sense of tactile curiosity to the material world can be found throughout her work, where Lee is sensuously alert to the materiality of the archival remains that she investigates. In 'A Seeker of Pagan Perfection' (1895), Neroni – a 'fanatical lover of human forms' – familiarizes himself with the materiality of the flesh by 'handling horrible remains'; William Oke, in *A Phantom Lover* (1886), imagines the 'hands of ladies long since dead' touching the furniture in his rooms; while in *The Handling of Words* (1923), Lee presents the act reading itself as a process in which the visual and the tactile are enfolded.¹¹³ In *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, exploring the 'dingy dens' around Rome's Piazza Navona, Lee discovers 'rows of musty, faded, worm-eaten, volumes' and 'heaps of soiled prints, engravings, and etchings' (SEC 10). She is closely attentive to the feel of the manuscripts she handles, written 'on the thickest and creamiest paper' (SEC 101), while reflecting mournfully that 'the paper has now, alas! become yellow and stained, the ink brown and shiny, the loose, mottle cardboard bindings give out a cloud of dust when you touch them' (SEC 101–02). Part of Lee's fascination with the music that she discovers in the Italian archives – principally scores of long-neglected operatic works – arises from the fact that they are manuscript copies, rather than printed copies of engraved scores. These documents are the product of the skilled hands and dextrous fingers of historical composers and copyists. In her account of the fevered rate of musical production in eighteenth-century Venice she notes that 'printing and engraving were thrown aside as too laborious and expensive processes' (SEC 159), because such was 'the rapid rush forward of Italian music, in the tremendous vortex of new compositions, [that] the work even of an eminent composer was rarely performed more than one season at the same place' (SEC 159). The uniqueness of these manuscripts leads Lee to ascribe a particular sense of poignancy to their physical decay, and the contact between the hand of the copyist and the manuscripts invests these scores with an aura that affords to them a peculiar potential for affective transmission.

Lee's work explores how this affective connection across time might be sustained by a sense of the touch that remains imprinted on these archival

scores. Paradoxically, it is the very marker of historical neglect that guarantees the promise of tactile connection: the dust that remains on the untouched surface. Lee warns against 'brushing away, perhaps over roughly, cobwebs and dust which lay reverently on things long untouched', for it is precisely this dust that sustains these objects' ability to transmit a sense of affective touch across time: 'dust has brought home to our hearts that [these] men and women once lived and felt, and [these] things once charmed or amused' (*SEC* 293). The affective power of these archival remains is attributed to the fact that they still retain the tactile imprint of their original handlers. While the artefacts of the Renaissance – 'a darkened canvas of Titian or a yellowed folio of Shakespeare' – have 'passed through too many hands', so that they 'retain the personality of none of their owners' (*SEC* 293), an 'old book of cantatas of Porpora', in contrast, was 'probably touched last by the hands which had clapped applause' (*SEC* 293) in eighteenth-century Venice.

This layer of dust stands not just as a marker of the fact that these objects have remained 'untouched' in the years between their creation and rediscovery; it is also the means through which they maintain their historical aura. 'With this dust, which we shake reluctantly out of the old volumes', Lee laments, 'vanishes we know not what subtle remains of personality' (*SEC* 293). In accounting for the 'subtle remains' through which this dust affords a sense of tactile intimacy with the past, it might be recalled that a great proportion of dust consists of, at least reputedly, dead skin cells. The Victorians themselves were alert to this, not least in the context of the archive. In 1871 the scientist John Tyndall speculated, for example, that half the dust caked onto the walls of the British Museum was accountable to just such inorganic matter, noting that 'the visible particles floating in the air of London rooms' were more likely than not to be the dry flakes of skin shed from passing bodies.¹¹⁴ Dust, it might be said, settles over these archival objects to form a layer of skin, and to brush one's fingers over the dust that lies upon these scores is, then, to feel one's body in touch with the skin of the deceased. Yet, as Lee's text makes clear, this skin is not dead, but rather sustains and gives shape to the 'personality' of the past.

These archival remains of music simultaneously offer the promise of touching the past, while also standing as emblematic of what has been lost. The musical score serves only as an imperfect record of the musical culture that it represents. The ontological basis of music in the eighteenth century, Lee argues, lies not in the primacy of the written score, but in the modes of performance that afforded 'real existence' to the 'abstraction in the

composer's mind': 'Music, according to the notions of the eighteenth century, was no more the mere written score than a plan on white paper would have seemed architecture to the Greeks' (*SEC* 117). While the score might allow for the transmission of the music as it is notated, it fails to transmit the style of performance, those aspects of the performance which were improvised or, more importantly, the modes of feeling that gave meaning to this music. Lee laments that 'the genius spent in an extemporized vocal ornament that was never transmitted to paper, in the delivery of a few notes that lasted but a second; the genius squandered in the most evanescent performance, the memory of which died with who had heard of it' (*SEC* 122).

Lee's sensuous engagement with the archival remains of eighteenth-century music continually leads her to reflect mournfully in her later works upon music's status as 'the most ephemeral of all arts'.¹¹⁵ In 'The Immortality of the Maestro Galuppi' (1887), she observes that the 'precious scores' of the eponymous composer, once 'furtively fingered by enthusiasts prying about the writing-table and the spinette', have 'become in the eyes of posterity, a mere heap of ruled paper, once white, now dirty, and fit only for the chandler's or the archive' (5). Here, the aura invested in the score by the 'enthusiasm' of its admirers' tactile contact fades when this touch is withdrawn; the score is no longer a living conduit of musical feeling, but merely a record of cold, objective musical data. Reflecting upon the 'fate of forgotten melodies' (13), she laments that the survival of the score alone – the 'heap of ruled paper' – cannot guarantee the transmission of those modes of feeling that music embodies, because music 'exists absolutely in us who listen'. The death of those 'men and women in whose mind [these melodies] had their sole existence' represents the 'total severing of all tradition between ourselves and them' (15). 'An Eighteenth-Century Singer: An Imaginary Portrait' (1891), Lee's quasi-fictionalized retelling of the life of the castrato Gaspare Pacchierotti, makes a similar point: 'the work of the singer is fleeting [...] and while the melodies of Mozart are in our ears, nay, even those of Gluck, and the melodies of their contemporaries can still be reverently copied from their dusty scores, *the way in which Vivarelli sang* [is] long since and entirely forgotten'.¹¹⁶ Looking at the portraits of Italian opera singers in Bologna's once vibrant Philharmonic Academy, she notes a 'sadness in the dandified singers, whose names have long been forgotten, but whose eyes are upturned and whose lips are parted, as if they still thrilled and delighted those that have been dead a hundred year'. It represents 'a world of feeling extinct and genius forgotten' (*SEC* 67). For Lee, the 'discoloured fragments' of a book

that recounts the life of Pacchierotti sustain only 'a faded, crumbling flower of feeling': a delicate bloom of ephemeral emotion that has now wilted away (*SEC* 120). At the book's conclusion, Lee articulates a hopelessness about the possibility of rekindling the modes of affective relation expressed by the music of this period: 'The music [...] will, nay certainly must, sooner or later be exhumed; but the revival will have taken place too late, [...] tradition will be gone' (*SEC* 294). The queerness of Lee's account of music history lies not just in its insistent pathos but also in the sense of asynchrony – the feeling of being out of time – that underlies such moments of failed tactile connection.

This chapter has explored ways in which tactile sensory experience is recruited by musical performance to facilitate alternative modes of embodiment for marginalized subjects. Musical instruments become technologies for the transmission of touch, allowing for the modification of the way in which queer subjects experience their spatial 'orientation'. Such musical experiences render the body queer by dissolving the corporeal and spatial boundaries that define the humanist subject: between self and other, subject and object, distance and proximity. As queer affective intensities flow into and through musical instruments – via piano keys or the strings of a violin – tactile contact becomes a means through which the body can experience an extended sense of mobile, desiring materiality. In Lee's writing on music history, tactile perception opens up new perspectives on how the queer body is situated not only in space but also in historical time. The final chapter of my study maintains such a focus on queer experiences of the temporal, turning to consider literary representations of music in which modes of abject and perverse embodiment respond to the provocations of evolutionary time.