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Reading the Novel: a Gothicized "Enterprise of Health"

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I came across a line in a journal article recently that has been haunting me. A Liverpool writer Pauline Rowe, speaking of a friend and mentor who instilled in her a love of literature at an early age, describes how he taught her to "write the words of others in my heart so that, in deep crisis, they came back to save me" (Rowe 2009, 76). Rowe's depiction of words being inscribed on the heart, and travelling within the body like invited fellow-explorers, recalls Denis Donoghue's comment that sometimes, after reading, "a word, a phrase, a sentence" lingers and "presents itself as though it had broken free from its setting and declared its independence" (Donoghue 2008, 44). Drawing upon these ideas, I want to consider the notion that the simple act of reading fiction, of reading the words of another person, has the capacity to offer help and emotional sustenance in times of crisis.

Any literary form has the potential to offer such a resource, but my interest in this article lies with the novel. Focusing specifically upon the Irish novel, I would like to consider the role that literature may have as a potentially tactile "enterprise of health" (Deleuze 1997, 3). Gilles Deleuze's notion of health in this instance does not refer exclusively to the physiological sense of the term. His intention is to focus upon the acts of reading and writing as means of instilling vitality and creativity into the processes of thinking. This is a form of health whose timbre is discovered in tandem with movement, invention and creation. Inspired by Nietzsche's belief that "[e]very art, every philosophy can be considered a cure and aid in the service of growing, struggling life" (Nietzsche 2008, 234), Deleuze sees philosophy entering into diverse, unpredictable and non-privileging relationships within the spheres of art, literature, medicine and science. Like philosophers, writers are creative thinkers and if we engrave others' words in our hearts in the way Rowe recounts, so too are readers.

Deleuze has questioned how we can nurture our growth and transitions through life if we do not have the courage to “enter into regions *far from equilibrium*” (Deleuze 1997, 109). This is where the Gothic may have a productive role in literature. Donoghue’s idea about words escaping their settings, lingering only to emerge in our presence at another time, has already introduced a Gothic spectrality into the act of reading. Gina Wisker has suggested that the Gothic is “layered with meaning, demanding interpretation and engagement from readers” (Wisker 2007, 402), furthermore it employs “strategies of estrangement and engagement to explore and challenge cultural, social, psychological and personal issues” (Wisker 2007, 404). In other words, the Gothic not only makes us think but can also enable explorations of emotional pathways that allow us to challenge beliefs about the world we inhabit. By stimulating and provoking emotions with tactics of displacement, the Gothic can assist our ability to interpret our environment. Erika Kerruish, also drawing upon the philosophy of Nietzsche, remarks: “emotions incorporate a passive capacity to sense the world in the context of a person’s efforts towards persisting and thriving in the world” (Kerruish 2000, 123).

The emphasis on processes of “persisting” and “thriving” takes us back to the idea of health. If the challenges delivered by the Gothic are cultivated by exploring “feelings, desires and passions” together with a “seeming celebration of the irrational, the outlawed and the socially and culturally dispossessed” (Smith and Hughes 2003, 1), then Gothic readings can take us to those “regions *far from equilibrium*” (Deleuze 1997, 109). If, as Jerrold Hogle suggests, the Gothic “shows us our cultural and psychological selves and conditions in their actual multiplicity” (Hogle 2002, 19), then the potential for creative thinking is extensive. Moreover, if there are vestiges of the Gothic within the act of reading itself, we might similarly conceive of reading as a means by which we can undertake journeys that directly challenge our emotions and beliefs. Such challenges provide incentives for resourceful and radical thinking and consequently open opportunities to unearth innovative ways of dealing with life’s crises.

It might be objected that reading and thinking can only be of minor import in the face of crisis. To answer this objection we might consider Deleuze and Félix Guattari's comment on the volatile and transformative mobility of "nomad thought" (Deleuze and Guattari 2008, xiii). Nomad thought is dynamic; it looks to the future without attempting to erase the past, and enables the assimilation of "a multiplicity of elements without effacing their heterogeneity" (Deleuze and Guattari 2008, xiii). Furthermore, by not impeding the flow of such multiplicities we may possibly encounter a source of inventive energy that can "break constraints and open new vistas" (Deleuze and Guattari 2008, xiii). If we view reading and subsequent thinking in this flexible and open way it becomes a form of creative empowerment; indeed, as Brian Massumi argues in his foreword to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*:

The question is not: is it true? But: does it work? What new thoughts does it make it possible to think? What new emotions does it make it possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body? (Deleuze and Guattari 2008, xv).

These questions encourage the reader to focus deeply upon the ways in which feelings, emotions and thoughts can offer journeys in syncretic perception, where words and tactile experiences interweave. But how does the act of reading acquire Gothic attributes?

A few lines from Alan Bennett's play *The History Boys* capture something of the essence of what I am trying to work towards here. In an effort to communicate what we encounter at the very heart of the experience of reading, Bennett says:

The best moments in reading are when you come across something, a thought, a feeling; a way of looking at things that you'd thought special, particular to you. And here it is, set

down by someone else, a person you've never met, maybe even someone long dead. And it's as if a hand has come out and taken yours. (Bennett 2004, 56).

The manifestation of this "hand" carries with it a sense of haunting, a benevolent haunting, from a textual, maybe even spectral, presence. Furthermore, if we view the Gothic, in the sociologist Avery Gordon's terms, as an "encounter of tremulous significance" (Gordon 2008, 134) that "speaks of phantoms" (Punter 2004, 3), we might even say that it evokes the idea of a meaningful union, a thoughtful conversation, between the Gothic and the act of reading.

Crucially, however, Bennett's words introduce the idea of reading as a form of touch. Jean-Luc Nancy offers a stimulating rationale for this idea in his declaration that "[b]odies are in touch on this page, whether we want it or not" (qtd. Derrida 2005, 225). What remains in the book after it leaves its creator is described by Jacques Derrida as "a small, stubborn, and tenuous grain, the minute dust of contact" (Derrida 2005, 225). The appearance of the hand imparts an awareness of the body; flesh and phantom form a symbiotic relationship with thoughts and feelings.

Bennett's words carry with them what might be at the very *heart* of reading: they suggest a heartfelt relationship between reader and writer. So it is to the heart I wish to turn. A vivid symbol of flesh and spirit and an ancient centre of emotion and thought, the heart is located by Derrida as our place of "secret interiority" and even likened to a "crypt" (Derrida 2005, 267). Derrida thus creates an instant link with the Gothic which, in David Punter's words, makes "the crypt the cornerstone" of its diverse landscape (Punter 2004, 3). In keeping with the whole idea of reading as touch, Derrida intimately links heart, hand, and body with reading, thinking, memory and writing when he asks: "Isn't the heart memory? Isn't it thinking of memory? Thinking as memory? We shall safeguard the recollection [. . .] as it also writes itself or is written on the heart and on the hand" (Derrida 2005, 35). Thus hand, heart, thinking and memory are inextricably entwined in a

choreography that becomes a heartfelt reading. We might also consider that when we read, it is a form of rewriting, even an inscription on the heart. On this note Nancy adds,

we clearly have to understand reading is that which is not deciphering, but rather touching and being touched, having to do with body mass and bulk. Writing, reading, a *tactful affair*. (Qtd. Derrida 2005, 127; emphasis added).

For Derrida then, there is no doubt that we read with our bodies. In Rosi Braidotti's words, bodies are "portions of living memory that endures by undergoing constant internal modifications following the encounter with other bodies and forces" (Braidotti 2008, 99). Derrida and Braidotti effectively challenge the notion that a sense of immediacy is absolutely necessary to the act of touching. Reading, then, can indeed be a form of touch.

One of the recurring and diffuse transmissions that occur between writer and reader involves the relationship developed with individual characters encountered within a narrative. Once the privilege afforded to immediacy in the act of touching has been challenged, there opens a potential for a more profound sense of communication with characters within the spaces of the text. Such conceivably tactile interaction, as Derrida suggests, "yields *presence*" (Derrida 2005, 121). Furthermore,

[w]e could then touch what is not! Which is to say, not only intelligible beings—beyond the senses—but also what does not even present itself any longer as a being, a being-present. (Derrida 2005, 121-122).

Derrida's words also resonate with Michel de Certeau's notion of the "presence of diverse absences" (de Certeau 1984, 108) which, for him, haunts the everyday as well as innumerable texts.

These observations help to further connect ideas of reading and the body with the Gothic. We have already seen that the “hand” that Bennett speaks of as accompanying the act of reading carries with it both a spectral and a material presence. In such a light, de Certeau’s depiction of the Gothicized body thriving within Gothic spaces is quite enthralling:

[F]rom the nooks of all sorts of “reading rooms” (including lavatories) emerge subconscious gestures, grumblings, tics, stretchings, rustlings, unexpected noises, in short *a wild orchestration of the body*. (de Certeau 1984, 175; my emphasis).

De Certeau also suggests that, rather than being a mere “impertinent absence,” reading has the potential to constitute “the network of an anti-discipline” (de Certeau 1984, xv). Reading can be confrontational and audacious, or maybe just startling, as references to the words “unexpected noises” and “wild orchestrations” imply—can be, in fact, like the Gothic. Indeed, for Fred Botting the Gothic is “associated with wildness” (Botting 2001, 3).

The essentially tactile elements of the reading experience are further elaborated upon by Vladimir Nabokov. He has written about the reader-writer relationship in a way that speaks from, to and about the heart and body. Nabokov likens the writer’s craft to an arduous mountain climb up towards the summit where,

at the top, on a windy ridge, whom do you think he meets? The panting and happy reader, and there they spontaneously embrace and are linked forever if the book lasts forever. (Nabokov 1983, 2).

A “tactful affair” indeed!

Before I move on to give some examples of “tactful” readings, I should clarify why I have chosen to focus on the novel. After all, Pablo Neruda said that poetry should contain the stuff of life that is “steeped in sweat, smoke, smelling of lilies and urine” (Neruda 1974, xxii), and the sheer physicality of drama speaks for itself. It is the novel, however, which provides that rambling sense of space in which to tell a story, to set out on an adventure across its generous landscapes. I agree with Franco Moretti’s description of the novel as “a phoenix always ready to take flight in a new direction” (Moretti 2007, ix), with Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion that it is like “a creature from an alien species,” full of “plastic possibilities” (Bakhtin 1996, 4). Similarly, John Banville has described the novel as “some enormous intricate thing dancing, in sadness, brief happiness, pain” (qtd. Imhof 1989, 17). For me, the novel is intriguing; it speaks of emotion, mystery and regeneration, and is full of what Margaret Doody has called a “rich, muddy messiness” (Doody 1997, 485).

The journeys we embark upon in a novel may be comfortable and undemanding. However, they can also involve more deeply challenging and thorny paths. Walter Siti, in an article that reinforces this sense of divergence, uses an interesting metaphor. Holding Flaubert’s description of Emma Bovary’s poison as tasting “like ink” up against Judge Woolsey’s famous 1934 declaration that *Ulysses* had a “somewhat emetic” effect on the reader, Siti sees the novel as both poison and medicine. Paradoxically, the “ink,” lifeblood of the novel, becomes both poison, like Emma’s draft, and medicine, like the emetic *Ulysses*. In this light the novel becomes the multi-faceted *pharmakon* which, by exploiting its powers of seduction in tempting us to read “makes one stray from one’s general, natural, habitual paths and laws” (Derrida 1981, 70). Indeed we might further concur with Derrida and affirm the dynamic relationship between “writing, the pharmakon, the going or leading astray” (Derrida 1981, 71). To avail of any sense of an “enterprise of health” (Deleuze 1997, 3) we may have to negotiate this “leading astray” (Derrida 1981, 71), the upheaval of the *pharmakon*. The novel may be the reader’s vessel for a journey which offers the potential, in the words of Hélène Cixous, for us to “experience the end of the world [. . .] to lose a world and to discover that there is

more than one world and that the world isn't what we think it is" (Cixous 1993, 10). Cixous here echoes Deleuze's challenge to journey to those "*regions far from equilibrium*" (Deleuze 1997, 109).

To tease some of these ideas out a little further, I would like to explore examples from three contemporary Irish novels: Mary Morrissy's *Mother of Pearl* (1996), John Banville's *Ghosts* (1993), and Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1996). An exploration of memory and place in the contemporary Irish novel is a meaningful exercise, especially in relation to reading as an "enterprise of health" (Deleuze 1997, 3), given Ireland's traumatic past, its extended history of colonialism. The continuing emphasis on these themes in Irish fiction indicates the way in which "memory recovers and re-covers, it hurts and it heals, it haunts and it empowers" (Friberg, Gilsenan-Nordin, Yding-Pedersen 2007, xvi); the potentially healing powers of memory and narrative can become what Banville expresses as a necessary "tender burden" (Banville 1998, 178). All three of these writers have conveyed a sensual textual geography in their work, while incorporating a sense of physicality and spirituality that the reader can engage with on a deeply intimate level. Each novel demonstrates what Derrida has called a "haptology of the heart" (Derrida 2005, 251). The word haptology (from Greek *haptesthai* "to touch" or *haptikos* "to come into contact with", "to lay hold of") expresses a perception of our environment or location that exceeds visual experience. There is an intermingling of a wide range of senses, including memories of earlier experiences of people or places or acute perceptions of place, sensations of touch, sound, smell and so forth. This meld of sensations may allow for experiences that are not easy to articulate, not easy to name, but are nevertheless distinctly *felt*—they may *touch* the reader deeply. As I will go on to suggest, the difficulty of verbalising such events with concrete accuracy may open up the reader's awareness of entering a Gothicized "ordeal of the undecidable" (Derrida 1994, 87).

In *Mother of Pearl*, Morrissy depicts Irene's longing for and reflection upon a baby who has been removed from her care, and who can now only exist for her in exquisite memories. Taking out her box of mementos, Irene touches a little lock of hair that belonged to the baby girl, a small bright

green mitten that was once attached to a coat the wriggling child wore, and a book with the baby's tiny teeth-marks in the corner of the pages. Irene's physical, tactile and emotional "reading" of this small treasure trove offers a means by which she can honestly say that "[s]he sees her every day [. . .], a child skipping ahead of her on a dusty street, arms spread wide greeting the future" (Morrissy 1996, 223). For Irene, the child "is not lost but merely waiting to be found again" (223).

In Banville's *Ghosts*, there is a scene in which one of the characters stands within an oak ridge. The air, permeated by the fresh smell of rain-soaked grass and wild flowers, carries an awareness of what might be called ancestral voices. The character becomes intensely aware of "living among lives [. . .] they speak of the past and, more compellingly, of the future" (Banville 1993, 101). The voices communicate a yearning to be remembered, and the sensual geographic description enhances the impression of human physicality, offering a palpable, earthy, and yet spectral sense of place. The past, both personal and collective, is likened to "a melody I had lost that was starting to come back, I could hear it in my mind, a tiny, thin, heartbreaking music" (67). The haptology of place incorporates an example of what Svetlana Boym calls "reflective nostalgia" (Boym 2001, xviii) in that the sense of *longing* does not aspire to reconstruct some lost place of origin; instead, the longing allows critical thought processes to thrive, however disturbing that activity may be. The therapeutic potential of such reading resides in an unsettling "upheaval of the internal" (Derrida 2005, 2) which is indeed a "tender burden" to bear (Banville 1998, 178).

My last example is from Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*. Here, a young boy finds his way into an underground secret passage of a great ancient stone ring. Such constructions are early medieval or iron age circular fortified spaces that can frequently hold sacred significance or hold narrative connections in myths and folklore. As the boy gradually descends into the passageway, "it simply became blackness" (Deane 1996, 57). He begins to feel his way around in the dark, touching "the wet walls," feeling "the skin of slime" and "the wrinkling moss." It becomes "a bronchial space" where sight does not help to negotiate the environment. Sounds and floral scents are

interweaved into myth: the wind becomes the breathing of ancient warriors, the floating perfume of heather and gorse is a signal of Druid spells, and the sounds of underground water transform into the ancient “emaciated ghost sounds” of women sighing. The cold of the place is described, with a physical metaphor, as “marrow deep.” The boy is afraid, but when he has escaped from the darkness, he looks back at the site and feels the experience to be “even worse in retrospect, more chilling and enclosed” (57). While the experience itself is described in highly tactile terms, the retrospective abstraction of the memory deeply intensifies the experience.

Each of these examples illustrates the idea of a haptology, that weaving of the senses which can produce vivid, tactile and, emotional responses in the reader. Each also displays its own kind of Gothic haunting. The characters negotiate their environments, read places and objects as we might read the novel, hearts and hands trembling with emotion, thoughts forming, memories playing as writer reaches out to reader, “as if a hand has come out and taken yours.”

So, what does all this add up to? How can these ideas be taken to constitute an “enterprise of health” (Deleuze 1997, 2-3)? Firstly, let us consider something Derrida says about touch:

But no living being in the world can survive for an instant without touching, which is to say, without being touched. Not necessarily by some other being but by something = κ [. . .], for a finite, living being, before and beyond any concept of “sensibility,” touching means “being in the world. (Derrida 2005, 140).

For Derrida, “[t]here is no world without touching” (Derrida 2005, 140); touch is intensely connected not just to our sense of health and wellbeing, but to survival itself. Derrida’s assertions are reinforced by Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau’s suggestion that the novel strives towards “depicting the human in a strictly human framework” and is “rooted in the depths of the body” (Thorel-Cailleteau 2007, 94). Reading is, as Derrida suggests, “*a tactful affair*” (Derrida 2005, 127).

Secondly, I would resist the classical interpretation of aesthetic emotion as merely a cathartic release of excess feelings. The intense emotions involved in the kind of reading that I have described can, paradoxically, encourage an engagement in coherent, reasoned thinking. Erika Kerruish has read Nietzsche in a way that shows that he “does not view reason as conflicting with emotion but as integral to it” (Kerruish 2009, 18), thus determining that “[t]he growth and flourishing of a self in an environment requires the ability to passively suffer the emotions that monitor its condition” (Kerruish 2009, 23). By becoming what Irigaray has called “actively receptive” (Irigaray 2004, 187) to these senses of touch, emotion and creative thinking in the act of reading, we might also navigate a path, to borrow again from Irigaray, from “corporeal inertia to a body animated with intentions” (Irigaray 2004, 188).

Finally, we might consider the potential importance of a form of thinking which engages with the reading of a novel in light of Deleuze and Guattari’s caution that “the less people take thought seriously, the more they think in conformity with what the state wants” (Deleuze and Guattari 2008, 415). Thinking and reading can be radical; it can cultivate a sense of radical vitality. As Rosi Braidotti puts it, “[t]hinking is about change and transformation. Thinking is enfolded, erotic and pleasure driven” (Braidotti 2008, 124). With this in mind, the pleasure we derive from reading a novel becomes a critical part of the reading process. The novel becomes a dynamic “dwelling space” which is, in Irigaray’s words, “made of our flesh, our heart, our thinking, our words” (Irigaray 2004, 7). This is just the kind of creative thinking which, for Jane Bennett and William E. Connolly, affords a thrilling, breathtaking movement which weaves its way in, across and around the body:

Thinking bounces in magical bumps and charges across multiple zones marked by differences of speed, capacity and intensity. [. . .] It is above all in the relations between the zones that possibilities for creativity reside. For thinking is not harnessed entirely by the

tasks of representation and knowledge. Through its layered intra- and inter-corporeality new ideas, theories, identities are propelled into being. Thinking is creative. (Bennett and Connolly 2002, 158-159).

It is just these resourceful “magical bumps and charges” that can exceed the mere rational explaining away of crisis, arousing the reader to focus instead upon “*feeling your way deeper and deeper [. . .] until you do feel what is at stake*” and move towards “a profane illumination” (Gordon 2008, 134). Such reading and creative thinking can offer what Irigaray assigns to the reading of philosophy: it “sometimes stimulates, even cures”; at the very least, it “sends us back to our daily existence with our spirit a little more alive” (Irigaray 2008, 4).

It might also be deeply disturbing, rendering our thinking a “configuration pregnant with tensions” (Benjamin 1969, 262). Using Benjamin’s concept of configurations I’d like to further elaborate upon some of the ideas already broached in this article with particular reference to Banville’s novel *Kepler* (1981). Banville employs the configurations of emotion, thought, nature and reality, further extending the concept of haptology by creating a textual “map of tenderness,” a term used by Madeleine de Scudéry to describe a map which accompanied her novel *Clélie* (1654). The *Carte du Pays de Tendre*, or “map of the land of tenderness,” offers a journey through the narrative of emotions to “countries” of tenderness and intimacy. Banville’s textual cartography does not simply represent reality but uses the map as a poetic means of communication which seeks to offer a tool for the production of meaning. Such a map embraces, to borrow Giuliana Bruno’s words, a “haptic route” and a “tender tactics” (Bruno 2002, 208). Furthermore it displays itself as a “mapping of *transito*” and an “emotional map of transport” (Bruno 2002, 208); a thought-provoking topoi with locations akin to “congealed ‘suddenlys’” (Bakhtin 1996, 102).

In *Kepler*, flowing maps connect the four cosmological elements of air, earth, water and fire which extend their influence throughout the text by permeating the body, mind and the external

environment. The elements materialize in the form of storms, sunlight, tears, loss, deep sadness, love, urine, sweat, clouds, illness and fever, wind and bodily functions as well as connecting rainfall with ink, writing and creative instincts. Fire interweaves its physical and metaphysical forces within emotional fervour, sexual energy and the sparks of an energetic mind as well as in the violence imposed upon those considered to be different. Banville shows that the same fire which spurs the writing of challenging texts can equally inflame the censorship that seeks to burn them. Within such an intricate cartography of syncretic perception movement and the possibility of change is evident. Banville presents a map of tenderness which acknowledges the importance of emotion in the pursuit of knowledge, questioning the certainty of "truth." By weaving the elemental forces into the equally changeable milieu of emotion and thought, Banville has created a "map of *transito*" which recalls the Deleuzian notion of "becoming," that displays reality as a state of flux. Constant stability and fixed identities are shown to be illusory.

There is an incident in *Kepler* which especially exemplifies the sheer force of creative thinking, presenting it as a potent transformative force in times of crisis. In a highly volatile environment of religious persecution, political turmoil, discrimination, witch-burning, enforced exile, death, war, legal and financial battle, Banville shows Kepler realising one of his most important scientific theories in the most unexpected of circumstances. Stumbling drunk out of a tavern accompanied by a number of women and drinking pals, Kepler vomits into a drain. In a Dionysian mapping of alcohol and intoxication, gambling, uninhibited dance, wild music, revelry, sexual abandon, vomit and human waste matter, Kepler experiences creative thinking that reveals one of the laws of planetary movement—that of the elliptical rather than circular movement of planets. Watching the women, who are described with a Gothic nuance as "goatish dancers" (Banville 2001, 363), move in an elliptical pattern in the light of the tavern window triggers Kepler's epiphanic moment. Thus the configurations of scientific, astronomical and geometric knowledge are grounded within the human cartography of Dionysian earthly pleasures. Mapping

new configurations of reality can emerge from the most difficult of circumstances, and the most human.

Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of nomadic space as heterogeneous, seeking to break through existing frameworks (or mappings) and creating a space for becoming, reinvention and change, is compatible with Banville's cartographies. Reading such spaces may prove a crucial process in times of crisis. Banville's tender mapping is comparable to nomadic space where we might encounter

an extraordinarily fine topology that relies not on points or objects but rather on hacceties, on sets of relations (winds, undulations of snow or sand, the song of the sand or the creaking of the ice, the tactile qualities of both). It is a tactile space, or rather "haptic," a sonorous much more than a visual space. (Deleuze and Guattari 2008, 421)

This haptic space is determinedly "of the rhizome type" (Deleuze and Guattari 2008, 422).

And so we return to the haptologies that enable pathways into these nomadic tender maps. The Gothic thrives as we experience textual locations that are at once strange but yet perplexingly familiar. Deleuze and Guattari, citing the ideas of Nathalie Sarraute, discuss a way of writing that "liberates the particles of an anonymous matter allowing them to communicate through the "envelope" of forms and subjects" (Deleuze and Guattari 2008, 295). This emancipatory act subsequently enables us to "perceive the imperceptible" (Deleuze and Guattari 2008, 295). Sarraute herself describes this "matter," bringing us back again to the body, as "a substance as anonymous as blood, a magma without name or contours" (Sarraute 1963, 94). Such "matter" may well flow through Banville's writing, but these tender cartographies can communicate an even deeper import, as Stuart Aitken argues: "The notion of a tender mapping is hugely appropriate to moving in and beyond imperial cartographies of today and we believe emotional geographies help us to get to that place" (Aitken 2009, 1).

Reading and creating maps of tenderness can have much wider, global implications. In times of crisis we might, through the act of reading, do as Deleuze and Guattari suggest and “[m]ake a map” (Deleuze and Guattari 2008, 13), a map that transgresses borders, uses multiple entryways and uses multiplicitous processes of thought, feeling and being, in other words—is rhizomatic. In this way tender mapping avoids concepts of conquest and appropriation and seeks to “caress the earth, stroke its contours, without asking for a reward” (Hassan 2005, 1).

In closing, I would like to return to the idea of reading as a benevolent haunting, about something far more active than a mere “deciphering” of text. Hélène Cixous reminds us that reading and writing are not simply frivolous pastimes, but rather activities that contain at the core a “hunger for flesh and tears” (Cixous 2005, 97). Cixous also suggests that when we become adults we habitually forget how to read, however “we used to read when we were children and knew how violent reading can be” (Cixous 1993, 20). Indeed, as Nietzsche said, true maturity “means to have acquired the seriousness that one had as a child at play” (Nietzsche 1997, 48). To treat reading with a sense of complacency ignores the violence and passion that is integral to the process, and subsequently to a Gothicized “enterprise of health” (Deleuze 1997, 2-3). By daring to acknowledge the intensity of reading, hand, heart, memory and thinking inscribe themselves in an enfleshed and spectral embrace that can nurture us through challenging times and inspire us towards possible futures. This is a connection which Cixous has clearly grasped, and there could be no better way to draw together the ideas I have suggested than to close with her defiant words:

The harpooners or harpists of the ultimate hours are occupied with this challenge: to fish in the space between the lines beyond the heart for what must return to the heart, and to make it sound once more. It is this hunger for flesh and tears, our appetite for living, that, at the tip of forsaken fingers, makes a pencil grow. (Cixous 2005, 96-97).

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