



Doreen Massey: Space, Place and Politics

Olaf Eliasson on Doreen Massey

Olafur Eliasson

I would like to share with you a couple of thoughts. I met Doreen more than ten years ago I was a art student and as many art students in the early '90's was very influenced by de...and came from de .(?). to .(?). and started to enjoy much more polyphonic ways of thinking and, you know, needing more gravita..., we needed tools lets say to tie into the political system. We needed doing tools. We needed, let's say, verbalisations of problems that felt emotionally a part of the world in which we live so in a sense a number of people – Doreen, and Chantal certainly as well, became important to kind of, let's say, suggest that the quality of space was, in a much more complex way than when we went to school, to be investigated and through that one could find a particular, let's say, potentials. This I hope has inspired a body of work, or I think has inspired a body of work, let me just mention before we bring on the first picture – I have a few pictures I want to show you –when I came in sitting down, roughly, somewhere in the first half I sat down over there at the back and it struck me just to kind of suggest a way, give you a little tool of how I think, I was struck by the fact that the white screen and the white wall behind us was curved on the top as you see and I don't know whether it works the same way for all of you but when I sat down I thought to myself 'Isn't that funny. That the Geographical Institute they would have a curving wall'. So I didn't look a the wall being flat for me, for some reason sitting over there probably, seemed curving and I thought 'Isn't that funny that you would project a flat two dimensional image', in this house in particular, and it would be kind of somewhat three dimensional you kind of radiantly, kind of throwing and you were sitting somehow around the image, until it struck me that it's not actually curved, the wall, it is in fact flat and this of course just took like one or two seconds, as you see it is in fact flat but it is an art because the blue line above it then shows you, clearly looking for more than a second, it's an art. Then you say it's just a white wall as anything else. And then I thought ..not getting into the first talk, I'm sorry,...how would I know that it was flat had I not looked at the blue because it was interested in when it is , you know, a flat representation, when is it curved and spatial. When does it have a body and when does it not? So I said well if I would walk in the kind of periphery of the space I could see by the time it takes for me to walk from there the change in the geometry to the space would tell me that this is not a curved wall, this is a flat wall because it would, you know, change accordingly. You, being geographers, of course notice very well. But just the fact that and this is in a sense nothing new in this way but it has become something new the fact that temporality would be so generous to us. The fact that we could use the time it takes for you to experience something as a tool to, kind of, measure the surroundings and engage in them. To see the potential in this not just being a formal exercise but actually reevaluating what does it mean to have a body, what does it mean to have, you know, relationships with spatial entities.

So having said this let's just bump through ..if we can turn the first slide on. Let me just bump through..that's the second. So the first one. That's an activist like look a like it's an action. I flew to Stockholm with a bag of green dye and dumped it in Strumen running through downtown Stockholm, roughly ten years ago, dyeing the river green and making it short, obviously most Scandinavian cities like rest of Europe have had an obsession with turning their cities into museums. Regulating any sense of temporality out of the city and as we know a river is a great kind of trajectory of temporality not just the kind of way the water flows but also because it used to be a trade route so on and so forth, as Doreen has told us. So I thought why don't I put some temporality back in the town at least for a couple of hours which it takes for this green non-toxic dye to run through the city, and so on and so forth. And the next day in the paper the police had calmed down people calling the police asking for the green colour and the police had said that there was a leak in the governmental heating system which is right on that first picture. (Laughter from audience.) So in Sweden, as we know, the regulatory ambition has an answer for everything and the state of calmness was quickly established in this way. But going from there (next slide) this is a EU funded project in

Utrecht which is very flat to west side of Utrecht 'Extra Sun Setting'. And of course the west side of town where all the not so fortunate midtown toasters live they would see this side of the sun. And clearly the representation derived from time or the sun not moving at least, in this case this is then coming into the city also, but from the downtown you would have this sort of billboard like which is very much the destiny of downtown and the economy of façades and representations and the renderings of houses, you know, the façade and obviously the more generous side of this is in fact this because there you are simply shared with the basic fact that this is a construction. It's not another bloody sun it is in fact just a construction, which led on to this project at the Tate Turbine hall and this is ..er..Chantal sometimes has talked about agonistic space where there was within a frame of reference a re-evaluation of the rules by which you organise yourself. And of course it was unpredicted by me as well but the whole setup turned into quite a interesting experiment for which Doreen also involved in writing and lecturing at the time. This was the first time I actually talked Doreen into finally doing something with me. And look at this different kind of erm social organisation, school kids trying to spell out things.. so it's a little community. Let me suggest it being a community where kind of, where you could kind of combine the sort of idea of being together having, you know, a social frame of reference and yet a very generous and non-normative tolerance of other people doing something else than yourself. So in a sense that was a very successful parliament considering the kind of very normative idea of how, what a European parliament has become today at least, in that sense it was very successful. Look at this cobble there, a London cobble and I'm sorry they're looking through a camera, how sad is that, on top of it? Anyway they're looking at themselves through a camera and look at her, look at what she does now with her head she's just checking whether ..well whether it's really her. (Lots of laughter) So if you think about a museum isn't that totally interesting and of course most museums are not like that because they do not necessarily follow the talks of Doreen in the sense that they have also become power systems, they have also become stigmatising and they have been obsessed with their own representation they have become very paradoxical in the sense that they talk about reflexivity and experience and yet they are so normative in the way they treat people and the way they kind of pedagogically try to tell people about essentiality and essentialist rules about how to be good and bad.

So this obviously is very important and why I tried to suggest that in this project temporality and Doreen also wrote a little piece of this at the Serpentine Pavilion. In front of the Serpentine Gallery they have these pavilions every once in a while, and I did one with a Norwegian architect called Kjetil Thorsen and temporality was supposed to be the main issue and we had a laboratory with a kind of a very weird mix of people talking and... but of course inside the talks became the kind of vehicle for the activity or the idea of the building, so the content would somehow generate the form and the building itself would just be a kind of ramp or kind of temporal idea allowing people to walk through. But the last picture I want to show is a picture that is just from ..?.this for me is a very exciting project because it is a waterfall and I like waterfalls. And obviously New York being what it is and the skyline of New York being what it is I have this sort of legacy and the burden of this incredible you know, in one sense great space and in the other sense stigmatised space especially due to the American pragmatism of dealing with what does actually constitute the notion of public. And this project I did in close collaboration with Michael Bloomberg and over the course of the time I got to know Michael quite well and clearly we had very different points of view about what art is and does to a city. Nevertheless the challenge which one could call a kind of affection I think succeed because regardless of how much the city had invested in depriving my project from time, in the sense of making it into a branding or sort of a logo or something or somehow a spectacle. A spectacle has very little temporality one could say, or Doreen says. Obviously the kind of friction that I had with the mayor was very inspiring in the sense that I thought well one thing he can is probably communicated wrong but the water is going to keep falling, the water doesn't stop, you know what I mean. So I could in my contract say that you could not do a press image of the piece. I don't want any images.. of course it didn't work. But you see I can as an artist use the tools that, in this case I'll say it like this, that Doreen gives me, to kind of make sure that the socialising potential, if you want to call it that, which is maybe limiting us but the kind of generosity of the project stays within my hands and I don't see any danger in then testing it out because not only do I speak for myself I also have the extra comrade on my side which is my work, which is the waterfall and the waterfalls so it does have time and as you know water falls with roughly the same speed, being geographers, everywhere. So

looking at it you also see how far away it is because far away the waterfall falls slower and closer it falls faster and so on. So you see the distance between you and there.

So, finally I wanna say I have just become a Professor at the University in Berlin suggesting opening a institute in the spirit of some of the thoughts that I have been going through very much inspired by Doreen and is called the Institute of Spatial Experiments. One of the first people to speak is in fact a cosmologist the whole idea also Doreen introduced me for..(To Doreen) Not **the** cosmologist you introduced me for but a different one...and a dancer and a cold war cybernetics guy and a social activist. So those four people together is a very poor attempt I'm sure, nevertheless an attempt to put together Time and Space and Body in a social context all in one in terms of founding a new institute, it's a public school which I am very proud about. So thank you for your time.