



Doreen Massey: Space, Place and Politics

Introduction by Doreen Massey

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Hello I'm Doreen Massey. I'm Professor of Geography at the Open University. Well I've been here now for more years than I care to think of..erm..and loved every minute of it. In a way the Open University has been, for me, the ideal place to teach and to do research because of its' social project and because of the way in which it really encourages us as academics to speak beyond the academy as well as within.

I guess I began my geography way, way back looking at regional inequality. I was really interested, as a northerner very used to blaming London and the South East for everything that was wrong with life. I concentrated on industrial location and issues of regional inequality and that gradually broadened out into a kind of wider economic geography, talking about cities. I've written a book about London just recently, for instance, and the dominance of finance over London and indeed over the country as a whole. And I've looked a lot at globalisation as well. So, one of the strong threads running through my work is that kind of very broadly based socio-economic geography. In later years I got more and more interested in, erm, I suppose you'd call them almost the background questions, the big questions that lie behind those empirical issues, erm, about how we think about space, how we think about place, erm, and that might sound very, very abstract and very, very theoretical and in a way it is but what I wanted to argue was that it really matters how we think about space, it really matters how we think about place and especially in an age which is so globalised we need, I think, really to re-think the notion of place within a globalised world. So a lot of my work has been about really trying to push those concepts, if you like, to the limit and make them more relevant to today's world.

I was lucky enough to have an atlas and a globe at home when I was a kid and, erm, just one of the stories I tell at the beginning of one of the books I wrote, a really theoretical book, but to try and explain this passion for geography I have is how I used to sit in bed at night and spin the globe or turn the pages of the atlas and just close my eyes and jam my finger down and see where it landed. And if it landed on land to try and imagine what time it was in that place, what the people were doing there, what season it was, you know, what kind of landscape it was, what kind of people. Incredibly naïve, I was a young kid, even then there was some kind of spirit of curiosity and enquiry about the wider world, which must have been one of the ingredients which led me into being a geographer. I've certainly still got it.

I think geography, if it makes the most of this moment, should be one of the key disciplines that we are focussing on. I mean on the one hand we've got globalisation and the current form of globalisation absolutely crashing, and the way in which the globalised world is organised economically is up for grabs. China is rising, Brazil, South Africa, India are all putting their economies into a level which challenges that of the dominance of the United States. So there is a whole different kind of, it's not only globalisation, but it's globalisation in its current form under challenge. So there's all that together with the massive inequalities that we face both between countries and within them. So there's all that side, which is utterly geographical, and of course we have the other crisis which is climate change and environmental pollution and that too has a lot of roots in geography. And geography is one of the few disciplines which could and I wouldn't claim it always does, but could really talk between the human sciences and the natural sciences as they are called. And I think that it is a job we ought to be doing, erm, and I haven't done it myself very much but I think as geographers as a collective that is one of the ways in which it could be as the forefront of some of the major discussions we should be having as a society at the moment.

The event that you can listen to here is one that we held in the Royal Geographical Society to celebrate my work and to launch a new centre through the Open University Geography

Department, a centre which is to be called Open Space. The event was called 'Spatial Delights: an engagement with the work of Doreen Massey'. And I think what we were trying to do with it was to talk about, obviously, my work over all these years but also to how as academics in particular disciplines we can talk between different disciplines and so the people who are on the platform in the different panels aren't all geographers, by any means. So we are showing how geography can talk to artists, how geography can talk to people in politics or in political theory and why thinking about space, thinking about some of the issues that geography deals with is important in all those other places too. The other thing we wanted to do is very OU and that is we wanted to speak in a way which wasn't purely academic, that would attract an audience that wasn't only academic and I think it worked.