



Doreen Massey: Space, Place and Politics

Audience Q & A Part 1

Linda McDowell

I'm Linda McDowell and I was at the OU in these wonderful Eighties too so I've had lots of debates with Doreen over the years and course I love her work like we all do but I just wanted to ask you – you're talking about the value of the relational ... and then in your summing up just now you said well it's – it's the big thing – sorry – I'll go a bit slower – okay so we're talking about why we mustn't stop at the micro but think about the bigger picture and you said it's the big things the re-structuring of the big relations of power that matter. And I want to know – I want to know how we identify these big things? How do we know – you said there's multiple stories, there's not one narrative; there's no end. So where do we look? How do we know what's big? Do we know intuitively?

Doreen Massey

I don't mean that the big stories are the only things that are important, the big relations of power but I do think it's important not to lose sight of them. And I think there's been an insistence on the production of every individual link, an insistence the hesitancy and the uncertainty of outcome and all of that just recently which is an understandable reaction to that notion of kind of neo liberalism or global forces as a steam roller. So it's gone to the extreme and that – the other extreme bothers me as much as the notion of global steam rollers rolling across the earth inexorably. How one identifies them I think is a matter of empirical work. I mean it's not precisely the difference in a sense between what I call the big story in a grand narrative. It's that they are empirically identified out of being in the world, living in the world and studying in the world whereas a grand narrative is somehow the concept that you already have - that you impose upon the thing to - in order to structure your analysis. I'm not going to get all these in the right order and anyhow some of them are for other people. Power and space though – I was thinking and Raymond Williams did this thing about "What I Came to Say", so I just tried to think about one or two of the things that I came to say when I was thinking about this session and one of them one of them would be about the – the understanding of not only the bringing alive of space - to make it clear that space and place are as important as - as is time in the way that we should understand the world but also that space is very much imbued with power and that relationship between the two is utter. And that power may be of many kinds. It's not, you know – a host of different qualitative times and I've been involved in a project just recently in Venezuela actually where I have --and there's nothing like trying to use one of your own concepts in a real political actuality that makes you develop them further. The complexity of that notion of space and power has for me been kind of massively elaborated by trying to push it through a real political situation. And the key concept I guess there has been that of power geometry. And the idea was that simply on the one hand space as a product of relations is always utterly imbued with power. But on the other hand the power itself always has cartography. If we – if we understand power as relational and that goes back again to the – to the arguments that were made earlier – that we're always doing things in relation and the power itself is a relation between then power itself always has a cartography and that could be the little cartographies of the home or it could be the grand cartographies of globalisation or the kinds of power relations that I said earlier were structuring the inequalities between the south east and the north of the United Kingdom in the period when I first began to think about them and indeed still do. So that absolutely, that trying to bring together a thinking space relationally, thinking power relationally, and - and locking them together has been a lot of what I've been about.

The question about local and global – I mean I'm going to – we could go on about this for the whole afternoon – I still use the terms. I still think the terms meaningful but the pat answer is the local and the global are not binary things which bash against each other but precisely mutually constitutive and I guess the example that we talked about really through the work that Jane introduced where the local is a product of wider shall we say not just global is a

weasel word – of wider forces at the same time as the so called global is also a product of the local – it's just one way of trying to bring that home. So they're not binary opposites. I mean a lot of the problems – even the global justice movement I think has been that we've had this notion that we should defend the local against the global as though they are combatants hitting each other from the outside. Now first of all saying that the local is in part responsible for the production of the global makes that kind of strategy at least one that has to be examined but also once you recognise that local implication in the global then you're saying it isn't two things crashing from the outside but what we're trying to do is to pick up on the global as it exists within the local and use that interdependence between places; use that interdependence with the beyond to turn it into an opportunity for intervention. So this isn't two things crashing from the outside but precisely that complex, internal structuring that comes from thinking place relationally enables you to hook into the relations which lead beyond and thereby have – you had it on one of your slides - a place beyond place. So mutually constitutive is dead pat – it's so easy to say. But actually if you take it seriously it can lead you in directions which have attached to them a different kind of politics.